

STRAIGHT LIKELY TO GET LICENSE/ PROGRAM CHANGES RESTRAINT TACTICS

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Straight Inc., a drug treatment program in Orlando, has changed its policy on the way it restrains clients and is expected to receive a one-year license today from the state.

The program has operated for the past three months on a temporary license that expires today.

"Chances are we will issue them one license," said Stanley Wagy, district program supervisor for the Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services, on Wednesday.

Wagy said the latest policies submitted by Straight Inc. appear to meet state approval, but it will be today before he gets the final word.

Michael Scaletta, Straight director in Orlando, said he received a call Wednesday from HRS district administrator Paul Snead, who told him the license would be delivered today. Snead could not be reached.

Straight's restraint policy "is the main issue," said Wagy.

Straight has used a method of restraint in which four clients pin another client to the floor. The organization said the restraint was used to keep an unruly client from hurting himself or others.

Under the new policy, "adult trained staff only will be doing the restraint," Scaletta said.

The policy was revised after a change in laws regulating agencies such as Straight took effect Aug. 7, Scaletta said. The Orlando Straight program had changed its restraint practices on Aug. 1 before the new law went into effect but had not rewritten the policy and submitted it to HRS, Scaletta said.

Founded 13 years ago in St. Petersburg, Straight is now a nationwide drug treatment program that tries to free adolescents from drug dependency through peer pressure therapy. Confrontational marathon "rap" sessions are daily rituals and new clients are kept overnight in the homes of Straight parents who have had children in the program.

Critics have attacked the program for its tactics, such as the restraint method and a no-privacy policy for newcomers, which have been compared with brainwashing techniques.

In a June inspection report, HRS called the method "potentially disastrous" and then earlier this month outlawed the practice at all state-licensed facilities by anyone other than trained adult staff members.

Because of a variety of infractions found during the inspection, HRS gave Straight a temporary three-month license instead of one for the full year.

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