

DRUG TREATMENT CENTER LEAVES

Roanoke Times, The (VA) - July 30, 1991

- Author/Byline: Associated Press
- Edition: METRO
- Section: VIRGINIA
- Page: B2

A private drug treatment center that faced allegations of patient abuse has closed its Virginia operation.

Straight Inc. closed its Springfield office Friday, the state Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services said Monday.

Straight Inc. spokeswoman Joy Margolis said the program dropped its attempt to regain a Virginia operating license, opting instead to transfer to Columbia, Md.

The program was to have had a hearing today on progress to correct Virginia licensing violations.

"They do not have a license to operate in Virginia as a result of waiving that hearing," said Jacqueline M. Ennis, assistant commissioner of the state department. "We made sure they understood the ramifications of that decision."

Straight Inc. has used controversial mental and physical techniques to deter children from drugs.

"There were dehumanizing things being done," Ennis said.

Margolis said 60 percent to 70 percent of patients do not return to drug use after participating in the program. Patients can spend a year or more in treatment.

"It's successful because its long-term. It changes them," she said.

The program had worked to correct several violations, including physical restraint of rebellious clients, but still faced problems in renewing its license, Ennis said.

Margolis said, "It was apparent to us that we wouldn't have a fair hearing no matter what." She said the program had met all state requirements by last week.

The decade-old St. Petersburg, Fla.-based drug treatment program for adolescents has faced sharp criticism in several states. Straight Inc. operates in Florida, Georgia, Texas, Michigan and Massachusetts.

Virginia clients or their parents lodged dozens of complaints about the program, Ennis said.

"Some of their practices posed a danger to the kids," Ennis said. "For example, clients could restrain other kids, hold down other kids who wanted to leave the program."

Margolis said, "We don't do that. We were in compliance on that."

Ennis also cited "spit therapy," in which children could spit on one another as a way of reducing egos and the need for social acceptance. "We thought that was inappropriate," she said.

- Dateline: RICHMOND
- Record: 9107300316
- Copyright: Copyright (c) 1991 The Roanoke Times