

Plaintiff suffered harm at Straight, ^{IBC} psychiatrist testifies

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ALEXANDRIA, Va. — Two staff members and a former client at Straight Inc., the St. Petersburg-based drug treatment program, told a federal jury Tuesday that if 20-year-old Fred Collins had tried to leave the program last year, he would have been stopped before he reached the door.

And a Washington, D.C. expert in child psychiatry testified that Collins "suffered emotional harm" from his drug abuse treatment at Straight because Collins never had a drug problem.

The witnesses were among those who testified in the trial of a lawsuit in which Collins claims he was forced into joining the program last June and kept there against his will for five months. The lawsuit asks for \$750,000 in damages and charges Straight with "abusive treatment . . . false imprisonment, assault and intentional infliction of emotional distress."

But the most controversial witness during the second day of trial against the nationally acclaimed drug treatment program came late in the afternoon after Collins' lawyers finished presenting their case to a six-member jury in U.S. District Court in Alexandria.

The first witness called by defense attorneys for Straight to rebut the allegations — and the one that provoked a storm of protest from Collins' attorney — was a television set.

After the courtroom lights were dimmed, the jury of five men and one

woman watched a 22-minute, highly complimentary videotape segment about Straight that was filmed and broadcast by *NBC Magazine* last year.

Collins' attorney Philip Hirschkop vigorously protested allowing the jury to see the segment because it was made before Collins entered Straight last summer.

In his pretrial rulings U.S. District Judge Albert V. Bryan has ruled that attorneys for both sides can only introduce witnesses and evidence that directly relate to Collins' personal treatment at Straight.

"You have consistently ruled that we could not go into other cases (involving other) clients at Straight)," Hirschkop protested after the jury had been cleared from the courtroom.

"It is highly prejudicial, and I move for a mistrial. . . . That tape violated every ruling you made in motions before this trial."

Bryan, who, had not seen the segment before he allowed it to be shown to the jury, denied Hirschkop's motion and ruled that he would instruct the jury on how they may consider the segment in their deliberations.

Several witnesses earlier in the day offered testimony in sharp contrast to the television show.

One former client, 20-year-old Greg [redacted], who has successfully completed the program, helped interview Collins last June. [redacted] testified that if Collins had tried to leave the interview room, he and other

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Straight from 1-B

Straight clients in the room would have blocked the door.

But on cross-examination from defense attorneys for Straight, ██████ said that Collins never asked to leave or tried to reach for the door.

Two staff members, 17-year-old Joey ██████ and 19-year-old Dean ██████ however, both testified that Collins would have been stopped if he had tried to leave Straight after joining it.

██████ also testified that clients at Straight were sat upon by "three or four" other Straight clients for not cooperating and that other clients were isolated in "time-out" rooms.

In addition, ██████ testified that when Collins said he wanted to leave the program last September, his progress at Straight was set back to beginner's status.

"Fred Collins was confronted for wanting to leave and was blown away," ██████ wrote in a progress report after Collins indicated that he no longer wanted to stay in the program. "We need to ride his butt."

Under cross-examination by Straight's defense attorney, ██████ acknowledged using a poor choice of words but said that Collins was troubled about Straight because his brother had recently run away from the program.

"We and the staff had to make sure that he was working through this thing and progressing so he wouldn't just sit there," ██████ said.

Collins' case was helped most by testimony from Dr. James Egan, chairman of the psychiatry department at Children's Hospital at the National Medical Center in Washington. Egan said Collins was not dependent on drugs when Collins went to the St. Petersburg program to be interviewed last summer.

The interview was required by Straight before Collins could visit his younger brother, who was a client in the program.

"I do not think he was at the time, or now, chemically dependent on drugs," said Egan. Egan based his testimony on three interviews he has had with Collins since last October, when Collins ran away from Straight. Egan also reviewed all the written material compiled on Collins by Straight clients and staff members.

"His history of drug use, which was present, was modest," said Egan. "His social functions were not impaired, indeed, they were quite good. He graduated from high school, he held regular jobs, he played first clarinet in his school band. . . . Everywhere one poked around, one found a young man who was doing very respectably."

Since running away from Straight, Egan said, Collins has suffered "serious estrangement from his family" because his parents no longer speak to him and he has been cut off from all financial support.

Ronald Goldfarb, one of Straight's four defense attorneys, countered that Egan has not spoken to anyone else from the Collins family and that he

has not visited the Straight program. And Goldfarb charged that Egan is not a drug abuse expert.

When he asked Egan to name such an expert, Egan cited Dr. Robert DuPont, former founding director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse. DuPont is scheduled to testify as an expert witness on behalf of Straight.

Still, Egan maintained that Collins had no "adoptive impairment" prior to going to Straight.

"But he has one now," he said.

That testimony, however, was countered by Straight staff director Chris Yarnold, who interviewed Collins last June and recommended to Collins' parents that he join the program.

Yarnold said he based his evaluation on statements made to other clients, on conversations with Collins' parents and with other clients already in the program who knew Collins.

And, said Yarnold, he looked at Collins' eyes.

"You can look in people's eyes and tell if they've been smoking marijuana," said Yarnold, who joined Straight in 1981.

But asked by Collins' attorney look at Collins' eyes Tuesday, Yarnold was unable to detect that Collins was wearing contact lenses. And, according to a sworn statement by Yarnold that was read in court Tuesday, former Catholic priest once identified the active ingredient in marijuana "tetracycline," not hydrocannabinol.

Tetracycline is an antibiotic.