

Drug expert says plaintiff needed Straight

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ALEXANDRIA, Va. — A nationally known expert in drug abuse treatment said Wednesday that if he had examined Fred Collins last summer, he, too, would have urged the 20-year-old college student to enroll in Straight Inc., the St. Petersburg-based drug treatment program.

And if Collins resisted, said Dr. Robert DuPont, former director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, he would have done exactly what Straight did: suggest that Collins' parents not pay their son's college tuition unless he joined Straight and worked to solve his drug problem.

The testimony came on the third day of a bitter civil trial that has pitted Collins — a self-acknowledged former drug user — against one of the most highly praised drug treatment programs in the country.

COLLINS CLAIMS in his suit, which went to trial on Monday in federal court in Alexandria, that he was illegally pressured into joining Straight last June and was held there against his will for five months. He ran away from the program last October.

Collins' suit, the most extensive ever filed against Straight, charges the program with "abusive treatment ... false imprisonment, assault and intentional infliction of emotional distress." It asks for more than \$750,000 in damages.

DuPont, a tall, amiable physician who teaches clinical psychiatry at Georgetown University in Washington, testified that Collins was "drug dependent" when he was interviewed by Straight staff members and clients last summer.

Under those circumstances, said DuPont, "It's vital for parents to set standards regarding drug and alcohol use" while they are providing financial support for their children.

"**THAT VERY** much includes paying for college support. . . . That's a prerequisite (withholding financial support), and, in my opinion, it's very successful."

DuPont said he based his opinion on a careful review of depositions from Collins' family and information provided by Straight while Collins was a client.

Collins says that he had stopped smoking marijuana four months before going to the Straight interview and that he drank beer only occasionally with members of his college fraternity.

When Collins went to Straight last summer so he could visit his younger brother, who is a client in the program, Collins was on vacation from Virginia Polytechnic Institute, where he had a 3.2 grade-point average out of a possible 4.0.

But according to Collins' father Fred Collins Sr., Collins had promised to stop taking all drugs before he went to college. Collins' father was particularly worried about Fred's drug use because he already had one son in Straight, he testified Monday, adding that he had threatened to withhold Fred's college tuition if he broke his word.

"**FRED COLLINS'** decision to continue using drugs (until March 1982) and alcohol (beer) is what disrupted his family," DuPont testified Wednesday. "He chose drugs over his family."

That, DuPont testified, was a strong indication that Collins was drug dependent.

DuPont added that Collins frequently wrote about his prior drug problems in a nightly journal — known as a moral inventory — that he was required to maintain while he was at Straight. The entries reinforced his opinion that Collins needed to be in Straight, DuPont said.

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But under intense cross-examination from Collins' attorney Philip Hirschkop, DuPont admitted that he had read only portions of the journals, which were provided to him by Straight. Other portions, in which Hirschkop contends that Collins criticized Straight, are missing.

Hirschkop also forced DuPont to concede that Straight's diagnosis of Collins' "drug problem" did not meet the standards established by the American Psychiatric Association.

"I THINK THAT the American Psychiatric Association is rather slowly coming to understand the seriousness of marijuana intoxication," responded DuPont, adding that he, too, once considered marijuana less harmful than he considers it now.

But Hirschkop continued the attack, pointing out that DuPont had never met Collins and "had no idea of how frequently Collins had used drugs or even when he used them."

Later in the day Miller Newton, Straight's national clinical director, conceded under cross-examination that Straight has subjected clients to "marathon" confrontation sessions "without proper sleep" and that clients have been "poked and pushed in the course of being confronted by other clients."

"It's true that a young person may have put a finger on someone's chest to make a point when things were heated," Newton said, adding that "no one was ever struck."

Newton also testified that rebellious clients were occasionally put on restricted diets of "peanut butter sandwiches, juice and a piece of fruit" while Collins was a client at Straight. And Newton testified that clients at Straight were deliberately forced to exercise in an overheated room last October, shortly before Collins and about 140 other clients were transferred to Straight's newly opened Virginia branch.

SEVERAL CLIENTS became hyperventilated and went into convulsions, Newton acknowledged.

But that incident, Newton testified, "has not happened again and is not something that conforms to Straight's policy — now or then." The marathons and restricted diets were eliminated at Straight before Collins ran away from the program because Straight's staff had difficulty "policing" the procedures, Newton testified.

Newton claimed he never saw Collins abused and that Collins could have left the program if he had wanted to.

Three parents who knew Collins at Straight supported Newton's testimony. All three said Collins stayed at their homes at various times during the five months he was in the program. All three said that Collins seemed to be benefiting from his experience at Straight, that he never appeared to have been abused and that he didn't complain about his or anyone else's treatment at Straight.

But under cross-examination by Hirschkop, all three said the front doors and windows to all the homes were locked so clients could not leave. And all three parents said the rooms where the clients slept were wired to alarm systems. One parent admitted keeping a microphone near the bedroom where clients slept in his house. Another forced the clients to lock their clothes in a closet before going to sleep.

AND A THIRD SAID that she would have reported Collins to Straight if he had tried to leave.

Collins' case appeared to be hurt when his 16-year-old brother George testified later in the afternoon that Fred used numerous drugs while in high school and that he passed out from drinking while in college. And while at Straight, Collins brother couldn't remember Fred "saying he didn't want to be there (Straight)."

The younger brother testified Straight had helped him overcome his drug problem and that he felt betrayed by his brother when Fred ran away from the program last October.

A jury will try to reach a verdict in the case today after attorneys for both sides make their closing arguments.