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Johannesburg doctor guilty of unprofessional conduct



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A well-known Johannesburg doctor has been found guilty of unprofessional conduct and has been suspended for a year for sexually abusing female patients over a number of years.

by NICOLA MILTZ | Sep 14, 2017



The Professional Conduct Committee of the Medical and Dental Professions Board, has found Dr Steven Levy - whose practice is in Sandringham - guilty of performing acts of a sexual nature on three patients dating back to 2011.

A handful of female patients lodged complaints with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) as early as 2012. Dr Levy's practice was still open for business up until a few weeks ago when he was finally ordered by the HPCSA to shut its doors.

He has been ordered to remove his name from the practice door, close shop and only allow patients to retrieve their medical files. All signs that he is the owner of the practice have to be removed.

Almost five years after the first complaint was lodged, he was finally found guilty on July 31 and suspended on August 23 from practising as a doctor for a period of three years. Two years of this period would be suspended on condition that he is not found guilty of a similar offence committed during the period of his suspension.

The pro-forma complainant of the Health Professions Council of South Africa, Ernie Janzen, said on Wednesday: "I have filed my intention to appeal against the penalty handed down by the committee. I think the penalty is too lenient. One year for such serious charges is not suitable. I am appealing this."

The inquiry into his conduct took place over five days in February in which three women testified at length about Dr Levy's conduct after he performed acts of a sexual nature. Several other witnesses were also called to testify.

He has been found guilty for performing prolonged rectal examinations that had not been medically indicated as well as unnecessary vaginal examinations also not medically indicated.

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To date he has not offered an apology to the women and has not informed his existing patients of the reason for closing his practice.

In a letter to his patients on August 24 - the day after the suspension - he said: "To all my valued patients after 20 uninterrupted and committed years of service as a general practitioner, I have decided to take a well-needed and deserved sabbatical for a year. My commitment to each one of you remains and thus I will endeavour to find a suitable locum Dr to fill in at the practice and continue caring for you and your family in the interim."

His WhatsApp profile picture announced: "Temporarily closed for spiritual maintenance." This has since changed to: "Be the best version of you".

One of the victims said this week: "We have gone down this long, painful path to show other victims of sexual abuse that this is not acceptable."

When asked to comment, Levy told the Jewish Report: "It would not be appropriate for me to comment due to patient confidentiality. I have co-operated fully with the HPCSA investigation."

Yael Band, a sexual abuse survivor and activist, sees the guilty finding as a victory. She has been closely following the case.

"This is an incredible victory. People don't believe that a doctor can do this and people believe it less when it is a religious doctor. Even if the penalty is considered lenient, if it serves to save one patient from his abuse, it is a life saved.

"If this frum doctor is prevented from practising for one year, just think about all the potential victims who will be spared from this suspension.

"These women have shown the most incredible courage and self-sacrifice by coming forward. To be able to stand up in our community, which is so judgemental, and to put yourself out there at huge risk, knowing you will be judged harshly, is huge.

"They have done this not just for themselves, but for dozens of other potential victims and for those who are too afraid to come forward."

Clinical psychologist Dr Aliza Bilman, who has been close to the case, said this week: "Being a victim of sexual abuse is an extremely lonely and vulnerable place. If the abuse is covered up, it serves to further silence the victims and allow for future abuse to occur.

"If the abuse is reported, it may allow other victims to feel supported and empowered and give them the strength they need to come forward.

"Sexual abuse is a serious issue that can have devastating consequences for those affected. It impacts mood, self-esteem, relationships and the general ability to function. It has taken these women a lot of courage to come forward and seek help.

"Sexual abuse must be addressed in the wider community in order to prevent further abuse and to help those who have been abused. Fortunately help is available and there are organisations in the community offering support. It is making strides in terms of empowering people to come forward."

7 Comments

- 7 Lisa Kowalsky 14 Sep
Well Done to all those brave women who had the courage to speak out about the abuse. Finally justice has been done! And other women will no longer have to suffer his abuse in the future.
- 6 Devora Even-Tov 14 Sep
Well done to those brave ladies who came forward. Saving so many other victims that could fall prey to this abuser. His sentence is far too lenient to match the horrendous crime he committed. The crime is taken too lightly and for the victims it is a crime they carry the scars for life.
He should be stripped of his licence for life and he should sit in jail. Never mind the financial payout he should be made to pay. When they have to part with their money it also hurts.
- 5 Bradley Swartz 14 Sep

I lived directly across the street from the Levy boys for over 20 years and this behavior does not come as a surprise at all.

Steven, would often be spotted by my sisters, sitting across the street on his lawn with a set of binoculars looking into their bedrooms.

I find these actions despicable and the punishment very lenient. Furthermore, to top this off, he is supposed to be "frum".....which makes me laugh.....hiding behind his kippah and davening like many others. Wearing a kippah and davening does not make you a good Jew!!!

Had this happened in the United States he would probably be banned from practicing medicine for life and would probably also go to prison. The rule of law is very weak in South Africa.

I hope the Jewish community of Glenhazel and greater Johannesburg comes out and strongly condemns this behavior.

4 *Mushkie 14 Sep*

It is an indictment and so disgusting that he received such a light tap on the wrist. He should be struck off the roll and be criminally charged and face the full might of the law.

I hope his victims appeal his ridiculously minor "lack of punishment".

He deserves 200 lashes in public with the shambok for every charge!

There is absolutely no excuse in the world for such disgusting behaviour.

He should have his medical licence revoked and be thrown into solitary confinement for a very long time so he can never come into contact with another person ever.

3 *Simon 15 Sep*

An ABSOLUTE DISGRACE that you publish such slander in what you call a JEWISH newspaper. To spread such vile lashon hara less than a week away from Rosh Hashanah, is stooping to the lowest level possible. It's disgusting what you have written. I will never read your filthy newspaper again and will ensure that my large circle of friends don't either. You're no Jewish newspaper, disgraceful.

2 *DR STEVEN BROWER 15 Sep*

I read the above article and notwithstanding the contents of the reporting, because I think that would be unfair to do so without knowing the facts of this case, I am disgusted that the Jewish Report has the need to publish such an article. Its bad enough that the doctor and his family now have to go through " his punishment", why is it necessary to inform the rest of the Jewish community.

Disgusted colleague.

I would appreciate it if you would publish my comment. thank you.

1 *Someone Else 17 Sep*

In my book, just because the Professional Conduct Committee of the Medical and Dental Professions Board proclaimed the doctor guilty does not mean that he actually did anything wrong.

I have personal, first-hand knowledge of a doctor being found guilty when it was completely impossible for the charges to be true.

I also know of another doctor being cleared of all charges despite the fact that his treatment left patients maimed. Two of those cases were later brought before the courts; in one case the underwriter's attorneys demanded that the doctor settle the case before the court could find in favour of the plaintiff.

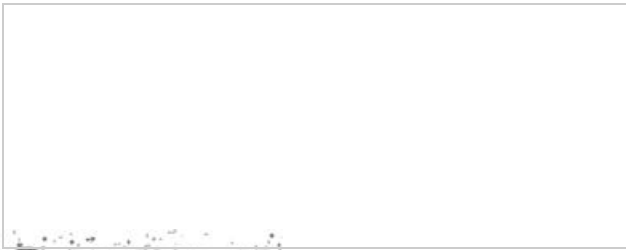
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