



Vero Beach, Florida

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Sanctioned Indian River County doctors to pay fines

By James Kirley

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INDIAN RIVER COUNTY — Two local doctors have consented to pay fines and other sanctions in settlement agreements with the state Board of Medicine, after one was accused of performing an unnecessary cataract surgery and the other of incorrectly prescribing pain medication to two patients.

Dr. Joseph Altieri, a Vero Beach psychiatrist, has agreed to pay a \$15,000 administrative fine and perform 100 hours of community service to resolve a complaint brought by the Florida Department of Health last fall.

It claimed Altieri had prescribed "a constantly changing cocktail of drugs" that included methadone, Zoloft and Xanax to a 29-year-old man with a history of problems with pain pills.

Another part of the same complaint alleged Altieri prescribed the narcotic OxyContin to a 47-year-old woman with "unsubstantiated chronic pain" and a history of heroin and methadone addictions.

Both the unidentified man and woman were terminated as patients by Altieri for missing appointments and "noncompliance," the state's complaint noted.

Phone calls to Altieri's office Tuesday and Wednesday seeking comment were not returned.

Sebastian ophthalmologist Dr. Ralph Monnett agreed to a \$10,000 administrative fine to resolve a complaint that claimed he did unnecessary cataract surgery on a 79-year-old woman he was also surgically treating for glaucoma.

Monnett said Monday that he remained "steadfast" in his belief the patient needed cataract surgery as an added treatment for glaucoma because it reduced eye pressure.

Neither Monnett nor Altieri admitted to the state's allegations by signing their settlement agreements, which were approved by the Florida's Board of Medicine last week.

Each physician also agreed to take extra continuing education classes relative to their medical disciplines and to pay for the costs of the state investigations.