



Venice psychiatrist alleges \$1M in extortion by patient

By [Anthony Cormier](#)

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VENICE - A psychiatrist has told police that she paid one of her clients more than \$1 million over the past decade after he threatened to destroy her reputation.

Dr. Cristina Vardi told officers she paid the man thousands of dollars a month.

Venice detective Howard Dunn would not comment, because the investigation is not complete. In a report, officials blacked out the suspect's identity.

But the report says Vardi, 50, took the man's case in 1999 and about a year later she lent him a couple of thousand dollars because she felt sorry for him.

The man could not pay rent or his bills, but Vardi told detectives that the payments grew progressively larger -- and she once handed over \$15,000.

Soon, the report indicated, the man threatened to "ruin" Vardi and "completely destroy her and her husband," Dr. Dan Vardi, a pulmonary specialist also in Venice.

The man also reportedly told his former psychiatrist that if she did not pay up, he would go to the medical board with allegations that she had sexually abused him.

Officials from the state Department of Health and the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology say that Vardi's license and board certification are valid. The state says that she had no complaints.

Educated at the Universita di Roma in Italy, she was first certified in 2000 and has been practicing in Venice since then.

Neither she nor her husband could be reached for this story.

When asked by detectives why she waited eight years to make a report, Vardi said that the ex-patient leaves violent messages and even called her family in Italy to threaten her.

Before she arrived at the police department, Vardi said she had been at the bank to deposit \$6,400 in the man's account.

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