

Ex-Patient Suing Therapist In False-Memories Case

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By Brent Whiting

An embattled Scottsdale therapist has been sued by an Illinois woman who has accused him and others of planting false memories of child sexual abuse and satanism.

Gina Smiley, a resident of Pecatonica, a community west of Rockford, claims in the suit that she received the therapy from Alfred H. Ells and others after she sought professional help for an eating disorder.

Ells, who is under investigation by the Arizona Board of Behavioral Health Examiners over allegations of unconventional therapy, said Thursday that Smiley received appropriate treatment for a number of disorders that she claimed to have.

"Based upon my knowledge, all of Mrs. Smiley's allegations are untrue," Ells said.

The action was filed Nov. 4 in Maricopa County Superior Court, seeking unspecified damages.

Smiley claims in the suit that because of negligent therapy that began in 1990, she became "mentally and emotionally dysfunctional and came to believe and express false memories of satanic abuse, multiple-personality disorders and other supposed mental illnesses."

The action says that Smiley became progressively isolated from her family "and came to believe that those who loved and cared for her were mean, hurtful and persons to be feared."

After severing her ties with Ells and others, the suit says, Smiley has been able "to regain contact with reality" and discover "the true nature of the 'treatment' provided to her."

Also named as defendants in the lawsuit were Samaritan Counseling Center, a Scottsdale clinic operated by Ells; two of its counselors, Renee Diamond and Karen Thompson; and the Remuda Ranch Center for Anorexia and Bulimia in Wickenburg, where Smiley's treatment began.

Ells' center is not affiliated with Samaritan Health Systems, the state's largest health-care provider.

The Board of Behavioral Health Examiners, which grants certification to therapists, social workers and substance-abuse counselors, announced earlier this year that it was concerned about "negligent supervision" of counselors of therapists at the Samaritan Counseling Center.

Ells said he welcomed a hearing after the board alleged that techniques used appeared to be "outside the recognized standards of practice."

He was found to have been negligent in the supervision of his counselors, and possibly to have disclosed confidential information about his patients. The board is attempting to negotiate a settlement to the case, and Ells still could face a formal hearing at which his license could be revoked.

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