

DAILY-NEWS RECORD ONLINE

Dentistry Board To Meet With Couple

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Paulette, Biery Slated To Discuss Allegations

By David Reynolds

HARRISONBURG — The Virginia Board of Dentistry has scheduled a husband-and-wife team for informal conferences in February to discuss allegations that they violated rules of patient care, according to letters the board sent each dentist earlier this month.

Stephen W. Paulette and Kathryn A. Biery, who run a practice in Harrisonburg, face allegations that they didn't take adequate precautions while using anesthesia when treating a patient in January 2005, the letters state.

Although the board's letters, dated Nov. 14, don't name Dakota Jeffries, they refer to patient A. The appointment date and complications listed for patient A match those of the 3½-year-old Berryville girl, who was hospitalized after receiving anesthesia at the dentists' office Jan. 28, 2005.

All the charges against Paulette relate to Dakota's incident, according to the board's letter.

But the letter to Biery outlines additional allegations, including that she allows and instructs dental assistants to administer sedation, including general anesthesia.

The informal conferences, scheduled for Feb. 2, could result in fines, reprimands or exoneration, according to the letters.

Should the board consider license suspension or revocation without a dentist's agreement, a formal hearing would be scheduled.

The Allegations

In October 2005, The Daily News-Record reported that Dakota had been flown to the University of Virginia Medical Center after an appointment on Jan. 28 for fillings in her baby teeth. She recovered later that day. The story was part of a four-day series that examined sedation dentistry and questioned its use at Paulette and Biery's practice.

The board's letters to Paulette and Biery allege infractions in the treatment of Dakota.

On Jan. 28, the letters allege, neither Paulette nor Biery did an adequate preoperative assessment, and they failed to find respiratory congestion that put the patient at risk for sedation.

The letters also allege the procedure wasn't well documented in office records, which don't list the dosages of drugs given to "patient A."

Biery Faces Additional Allegations

The board's letter to Biery also alleges that she allowed an assistant to give nitrous oxide to patient A.

Biery faces additional allegations that she may have broken rules on other days after Dakota's emergency. One complaint involves patient treatment and the other inappropriate billing, according to the board's letter to Biery.

On April 15, 2005, Biery failed to adequately document her diagnosis of "patient B" or the planned treatment, the letter states. It also says office records don't show patient B's blood pressure, pulse or who

administered anesthesia.

She failed to use the state-mandated three-man team during the procedure on April 15, which involved general anesthesia, the letter says.

The letter also alleges that on July 14, 2005, Biery billed a patient's account for work that had not been done.

Unavailable For Comment

The dentists' attorney, James Mayson, with Timberlake, Smith Thomas & Moses in Staunton, could not be reached for comment on the board's allegations.

In the past, Mayson has said Biery and Paulette were present during Dakota's treatment and that they responded to her emergency professionally.

Dakota was stable when she left the office and was breathing through an oxygen tube, Mayson said.

The office sedates anxious patients as part of its practice, Mayson said, but the dentists know the risks and are prepared to handle them.

Further information on the board's investigation leading to the charges against Biery and Paulette is confidential, said Sandra Reen, the board's executive director.

The Feb. 2 conferences, at 9 a.m. for Biery and 1 p.m. for Paulette, are open to the public, Reen said. The special committee's deliberations on punishment or exoneration are closed, she said.

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