

Detroit Free Press

DETROIT FREE PRESS

Dentist is facing sex charges

Ex-patients, staffers among accusers in Waterford

By L.L. BRASIER
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

In five years, Dr. Kenneth Friedman built a thriving dental practice in a tidy brick building in Waterford where judges, attorneys and physicians and their families helped fill the busy appointment calendar.

But in addition to those happy smiles, authorities said, were uneasy secrets.

Almost a dozen women have told officials that Friedman slipped his hand inside their cloth-

ing and fondled their breasts while they were sedated with intravenous Demerol and Valium. Three of Friedman's employees have told investigators they've seen molestations.

On Tuesday, Friedman will be in Waterford District Court, charged with four counts of misdemeanor fourth-degree criminal sexual conduct and one count of felony second-degree criminal sexual conduct.

Additionally, a pending complaint against Friedman, the father of three, was filed with state

licensing officials 10 days before police opened their investigation.

Attorney Richard Lustig, speaking of behalf of Friedman, denied the charges, characterizing them as the handiwork of a handful of disgruntled employees and patients who are either easily led or interested in profitable civil suits.

"These women were sedated, and then all of a sudden they come up with this, after police talk to them?" Lustig said last week.

Prosecutors, though, say they have an arsenal of compelling evi-

dence to present in court, beginning with Tuesday's preliminary exam.

Oakland County Assistant Prosecutor Mark Barron said the assaults took place over four years, from 1998 until the police were contacted in August.

The women range in age from their 20s to their 60s and did not know each other. In almost every case they told someone — a friend, spouse or new dentist — of the assault.

"Their stories are consistent," Barron said.

Waterford Police Detective Steve Ryner said many of the women thought they were the

only victims, and hesitated to call police fearing they wouldn't be believed.

Attorney James Elliott represents two of the employees who said they saw incidents, confronted the dentist and asked him to seek help. Elliott said the women left the office when the atmosphere turned abusive.

"I think they thought they could get him to get some help, and he kept promising that he wouldn't do it anymore," he said.

Another employee went to police on Aug. 20, telling them she saw Friedman fondle a sedated

Please see DENTIST, Page 3B

DENTIST | Trial to start Tuesday in Waterford

From Page 1B

woman. Investigators contacted women on Friedman's patient list and more accusations were made.

Elliott represents five of the women who say they were abused under sedation, including one who said Friedman fondled her, rolled his chair across the room to peer down the hallway, then rolled back and fondled her again.

Another told him to stop, "and he told her to close her eyes and go back to sleep," Elliott said.

"They were aware of what was happening and all they could do is lay there and watch it happen," Elliott said.

Lustig said the women had been coached by police and prosecutors, and that dentists sometimes place equipment on the bibs that cover their patients' chests.

One of Friedman's accusers is a former staff member who alleges that Friedman offered her dental care, sedated her, and then molested her. She confronted him and quit.

After she left, Friedman wrote a letter that the prosecution plans to use against him.

In the letter to the woman's husband, Friedman wrote:

"Please hear me out before you throw this note away I completely understand your feelings

on this matter and who could blame you for feeling this way. I've made a big mistake and I'm doing what I can to make things better. . . . As a very special favor (which I don't deserve) can you give me a second chance and some time to right myself . . . I hope in time I can gain some respect as a good friend."

Lustig says the letter is not a confession, but instead was written about an unrelated office conflict.

Friedman's arrest shocked his patients, some of whom are outspoken in their defense of him.

"I simply do not believe that it happened," said James Burdick, a Bloomfield Hills defense attorney. "My family has been going there for years and will continue to go there. I have absolutely no hesitation taking my 14-year-old daughter Laura there, and will continue to take her there. My wife goes there. Never have I seen anything the least bit inappropriate."

Oakland County Circuit Judge Edward Sosnick is another loyal patient. "I never saw anything that would seem unprofessional," he said.

Friedman continues to practice, but a court order requires a third party to be present during treatments.

Contact L.L. BRASIER at 248-858-2262 or brasier@freepress.com.