

Three years later, doctor takes plea deal in TV sex sting

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December 17, 2009



An East Bay oncologist pleaded no contest Thursday to felony attempted lewd conduct with a child under 14 in a televised sex sting operation conducted in Petaluma three years ago.

Now, Dr. Maurice Wolin, 51, will have to register as a sex offender for the rest of his life and faces up to 90 days in the county jail under the terms of his plea agreement approved by Judge Arthur Wick.

The charge could have brought a state prison sentence.

Wolin declined to comment as he left the courtroom with his lawyer, Blair Berk. He was among the last of 31 defendants in the 2006 case led by Petaluma police and assisted by a Southern California-based group called

Perverved Justice. Arrests were aired ON NBC's "Dateline" segment, "To Catch a Predator."

"I'm very satisfied with the result," said Petaluma police Lt. Matt Stapleton, who oversaw the investigation and attended the hearing. "There are a lot of people who did a lot of good work here and this case reflects that."

Wick will read probation reports on Wolin before issuing his sentence on Feb. 26, bringing to a close a lengthy legal fight as Wolin tried to clear his name.

Wolin's case was headed to trial in January after three years of legal wrangling by his attorney, who challenged the authenticity of Internet chats Wolin is accused of having with a decoy who set up a sexual rendezvous in Petaluma.

Berk also motioned to dismiss the case after Perverved Justice officials revealed that a computer hard drive recording the chats had crashed. Prosecutors argued copies of the conversations were captured on a computer server.

Deputy District Attorney Brian Staebell said a judge had ruled the chats would have been admissible at trial and he was preparing his case when Wolin made his plea. He said prosecutors didn't negotiate with Wolin and his agreement was made with the judge.

"It's an appropriate sentence and along the lines of how all these cases have been handled," Staebell said. "Any notion that Wolin got out from underneath something, that would be a misunderstanding of the facts."

In addition to lifetime sex offender registry, Wolin's physician's license has been suspended by the California Medical Board and could be revoked in a future hearing, an agency spokeswoman said.

Other defendants in the sting had sentences ranging from probation to nine months in county jail. Two defendants were handed state prison terms because they had prior offenses and all but one will have to register as a sex offender, said Chief Deputy District Attorney Joan Risse.

Five cases are pending trial but could be settled at any time, she said.

The convictions were the result of an August 2006 sting in which Perverted Justice officials posing as minors solicited men on the Internet. Defendants were lured to a house in Petaluma where they were filmed by Dateline NBC crews and arrested.

Prosecutors said Wolin, a Piedmont physician, chatted under the moniker "Talldreamy_Doc" with a decoy he thought was a 13-year-old girl who went by "Willowfilipino." Wolin discussed having sex with the girl for about three days before driving the 60 miles from his home to meet her, Staebell said.

He arrived in Petaluma only to find TV cameras and police. His arrest was televised, Stapleton said.