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Drug Dealer, Botched Abortion Doc – Back in Jail



According to Seattle's Daily Weekly Story, [Howard Levine, Ex-Dr. Viagra Who Sold 'Roids at Starbucks, Heads Back to Prison](#) By Rick Anderson, Wednesday, Mar. 3 2010

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Abortionist Howard Levine – is back in jail. The onetime nightclub singer and abortion doctor became the Internet's Dr. Viagra, then attempted to extort a half-million dollars from Jack in the Box, and wound up selling steroids to gay clients at his neighborhood Starbucks on Capitol Hill. For that last rap, he got out of prison in January 2009 and seven months later was caught selling meth. Last week, he was sent back to prison, his third stay in ten years.

He's proving to be a doctor who can't heal thyself and didn't do all that well with some of his patients either. At his East Madison Street clinic, he kept a pool table in the exam room and beer in the refrigerator. **In his abortionist past, at least nine patients accused him of violations ranging from verbal abuse to perforating their uteruses.** Now he sees his own doctors, one of whom recently told a federal judge that the man who once earned top honors in med school has a probable bipolar disorder and is likely a meth addict.

"If he tackled his methamphetamine dependence, it should be possible to address the other troublesome **psychological issues,**" says Paula Deutsch, his federal public defender. "Once the bipolar disorder is stable, he should be able to function much better. It is important to remember that Howard is a highly accomplished professional who achieved quite a bit in his earlier years," and could return to form with another doctor's help.

Assistant U.S. attorney Mark Parrent is less convinced. "In particular," he says, "the government is concerned about not only the defendant's admitted use of methamphetamine, but the reckless

circumstances of his use. The defendant, as a very intelligent man and a two-time federal felon, knows very well what is expected of him on supervised release but has chosen to evade his responsibilities.”

He copped to using meth but was also accused of trying to sell it last August, **after doing one year of a 22-month sentence for peddling steroids.** He also allegedly committed several probation-rule violations. “Although the defendant’s psychological issues may have contributed to his behavior,” says Parrent, “clearly he also is able to make choices and simply is choosing to opt out of the rigors of meaningful supervision.”

The U.S. sought a ten month re-commitment and 26 months of probation; last Wednesday, the court gave him eight months in prison along with the supervised release thereafter. A once-wealthy doctor with a family and successful practice, Levine should be free again by mid-year.

Whether or not he makes something of it, his psychologist, Sheppard Salusky, indicates, depends on how he deals with “denial, minimization, and deception to self and others.” It will be uphill all the way. Having lost everything including his big Capitol Hill home and his medical license, he will once again be starting from scratch, this time at age 61.

In 2008 the [paper](#) reported that Levine’s Washington state medical license, which he has held since 1982, **has been suspended three times** and reinstated twice in the last eight years; among other complaints, some patients said his doubtful surgical skills sent them hurrying to the emergency room for repairs.

In 2007, the [Medical Quality Assurance Commission](#) and the state Department of Health reported that Levine has had his license immediately suspended for alleged illegal sales of steroids and human growth hormones. Howard J. Levine (MD00019774) was charged with selling the controlled substances to undercover law enforcement agents posing as patients. Based on information from federal agents, **the statement of charges alleged Levine took no patient histories or physical exams. He did not take blood tests to determine if the patients required hormones or growth hormones for medical reasons at the time drugs were provided.** Levine was also in violation of previous disciplinary orders including practicing medicine over the Internet.

Levine had pleaded guilty to a single count of illegal steroid trafficking, one of thousands of mostly Internet-based steroid sales he made to customers across the United States since at least 2004, prosecutors say, including some to undercover bodybuilders from the Drug Enforcement Agency. During that time, the medical watchdogs hadn’t been barking, and the feds were especially patient, buying drugs from him for almost two years. Their nearly \$7,000 in undercover purchases over 22 months likely helped Levine stay in business until August 2006, when a SWAT team arrived at his Seattle home.

There he was arrested and forced to close his Capitol Hill office—but not indicted. That wouldn’t happen until June 2007. In the meantime, as a licensed physician, Levine continued to traffic in steroids and other drugs from his house on a tree-lined street near Seattle University. He was also apparently cooperating with the feds to build a case against his suppliers, and in

court records said he had an “agreement” with the DEA to keep his license. Officials at the state Medical Quality Assurance Commission in Olympia say they were aware of the investigation, but didn’t suspend Levine’s license until he was indicted in June 2007.

But a police investigation turned up thousands of pills and drug vials around the former abortion doc’s house.

Abortionist Levine completed study at New York Medical College in Valhalla and was first licensed in 1979, practicing in New York and California before opening the **Women’s Health Care Center** in Seattle in the early ’80s.

There he did abortions, but not always well. **According to State Department of Health records, from 1991 through 1998 at least nine patients accused him of violations ranging from verbal abuse and refusal to don surgical gloves to perforating the uteruses of several patients who later required emergency surgery—in one case, a lifesaving hysterectomy. The complaints led to a suspension by the state medical commission, although the order was immediately stayed if he gave up his gynecology practice.**

By 1999, the abortionist had reinvented himself as both a gay man and as Dr. Viagra, becoming one of the first physicians to peddle the erectile dysfunction drug over the Internet (he also charged \$75 for an “online consultation”). That practice, which in this state requires in person consultation, was shortly shut down by the state because Levine, officials said, had not established a physician-patient relationship with some of his unseen clients. He was also sued by Kansas officials for selling Viagra to a teen; though he won the suit, it was a costly defense.

That was when Levine turned to Jack in the Box for sustenance, devising a cash-flow plan that even his attorney admitted was bizarre: One day, in 1999, he phoned an executive of the fast-food corporation in San Diego, threatening to sue and go public over an allegedly spoiled chicken sandwich he’d purchased.

“Write me a check for \$500,000 and I will swear to you I will destroy any lab reports, any pieces of chicken that may be in my freezer, and you will never hear from me again,” he said in the call, which was taped. Most, if not all, of the story was made up, and Levine was convicted of extortion and wire fraud. In 2000, as he went to prison, the state suspended his license for the federal conviction and for improper Viagra sales as well.

Released after serving 21 months at the Federal Detention Center in Sheridan, Ore., Levine’s medical license was reinstated in August 2002, but he was placed on three years’ probation and barred from supplying medicine to Internet customers. (He was also on three years’ federal court probation for the extortion.)

How did Levine dodge license revocation? The state medical commission uses a graduated system of discipline—“the least restrictive action to correct behavior or performance,” says Health Department spokesperson Donn Moyer. “The discipline history on this practitioner,” he says of Levine, “shows that he would be sanctioned for a certain behavior, then would change and come under scrutiny for a different kind of violation. It’s unique.”

. Within a month of his reinstatement, Levine had opened a private “lifestyle” practice just off East Madison Street in Seattle, in an office renting for \$2,300 a month, where he would eventually dispense steroids via cyberspace.

It was not a typical doctor’s office. **Along with the pool table in the exam room, Levine kept beer in the office refrigerator—both a big hit with some patients.** “A pool table is a lot better way to pass the time than reading 10-year-old magazines,” says friend Fred Bard. “And besides, how many other doctors keep a bottle of Scotch in their desk drawers?”

In January 2006, Levine was brought up on charges for failing to pay a fine and attend medical-ethics classes as required by the extortion disciplinary action. On June 1, 2006, he was censured by the state after paying up and attending classes, records show. Three months later, in August, he was arrested by the feds for the Internet steroid sales, and the next year rearrested and indicted.

Unfortunately, part of Levine’s solution became part of the problem when he started to self-medicate with a small pharmacy of mind-altering drugs, none of them friends of bipolarization: A urine tox screen, wrote the psychiatrist, “was positive for methamphetamines, amphetamine, and benzodiazepines. Mr. Levine endorses use of IV cocaine, methamphetamines, MJ [marijuana], and Stadol [a narcotic pain reliever], as well as daily GH [growth hormone]...and alcohol.” He’d recently had a few mushrooms, too.

The City Attorney’s office informed Levine it planned to confiscate his aging, drafty five-bedroom house under the state’s drug-related seizure law. There, police had discovered several thousand pills in unlabeled bottles, along with steroids and narcotics—altogether 28 different drugs. They also recovered receipts for Internet sales, Levine’s computer, shipping products, and a credit-card machine. In one three-month period, evidence indicated, he’d written 62 prescriptions, mostly for out-of-state residents. The house, said SPD Det. Linda Diaz, was subject to seizure because it was used “to facilitate the drug trafficking activities of Howard J. Levine.”

In February, Levine was sentenced to 22 months in prison by Judge Robart, along with three years of supervised release during which he’ll also have to undergo drug testing and mental health counseling.

In April 2009 the [Medical Commission](#) permanently revoked the license of physician Howard J. Levine (MD00019774). Levine engaged in a pattern of illegal conduct and incompetent medical practice; illegally prescribed controlled substances to individuals who weren’t his patients and failed to examine them; has two federal felony convictions; failed to comply with previous agreed orders; and tested positive for use of controlled substances. The commission believes Levine can never be rehabilitated and can never regain his ability to practice medicine with reasonable skill and safety.