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Physician's days as fugitive are over

Kay Harris and Adam Floyd
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The 11-year odyssey of a Valdosta physician who fled the country in 2003, facing prosecution for performing illegal abortions, has come to an end behind the bars of the Lowndes County Jail.

Dr. Charles Rossmann, OB/GYN, 68, was accused of performing illegal abortions in his office on North Patterson Street. He left the area and the United States to live abroad rather than face charges connected with allegations concerning his medical practice.

Officials began investigating Rossmann in May 2003 when a 23-year-old woman called 911 following what was described as a botched late-term abortion which resulted in a live birth. The male infant, born at 31 weeks, died 12 days later after being transferred to Shands Hospital in Florida.

Investigations into Rossmann's practice and conduct ensued, and when authorities went to arrest the physician, they found he had fled overseas.

"Last year, we located Dr. Rossmann, and he was arrested in Germany on a federal warrant by Interpol and the German police. Once he was arrested, Dr. Rossmann was extradited to the United States and brought to the Lowndes County detention center in January," Valdosta Police Chief Brian Childress said Tuesday.

Rossmann is facing charges on multiple counts of criminal abortion, drug charges, and a Federal Bureau of Investigation warrant for unlawful flight to avoid prosecution, according to the VPD. Childress said more charges may be added. Rossmann is not eligible for bond.

In Times articles chronicling the allegations and investigation in 2003, it was reported that on May 3, 2003, a 23-year-old woman allegedly seeking an abortion in her third trimester met Rossmann at his office. He reportedly supplied her with medicine to induce an abortion, but at some point, for reasons that were not explained, the woman was left alone in the building. When she could not reach Rossmann, and in the process of giving birth, she called 911 and paramedics reportedly had to break into the office to get to her and the child. The infant survived for 12 days.

When reports of the incident became public, several other women contacted authorities with similar stories, prompting an investigation. Authorities obtained a warrant for Rossmann's arrest on a charge of criminal abortion on May 21, 2003, but were unable to locate the doctor. Earlier that week, The Times photographed a moving van at his office, which was empty by the time the warrants were issued. Authorities soon located the moving van, but not the physician.

Rossmann had reportedly cleaned out a safe in his office which may have

contained cash and passports. Authorities immediately suspected he had fled the country, potentially to the Czech Republic, where he had lived previously and received medical training.

Following the charges, the Georgia Medical Board immediately suspended his medical license.

Rossmann began practicing obstetrics and gynecology in Valdosta in 1994. He had also practiced in Alabama, Florida, Indiana, South Dakota and Canada, and received medical training in Canada, South Africa and the Czech Republic.

Authorities located Rossmann in 2013 in Germany, and Childress said, a number of agencies collaborated to have him extradited to Valdosta.

“This is a case that has been going on for 11 years now, and I am extremely proud of the work of Capt. Bobbie McGraw, Assistant District Attorney Bennett Threlkeld and the agencies involved, especially the German police. Everybody came together. Dr. Rossmann thought he got away with it, but he thought wrong,” Childress said.

Conversation

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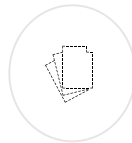


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