

NEWS

Red River Women's Clinic doctor investigated for expired license

Fargo police are withholding details of their investigative findings into a Red River Women's Clinic doctor with an expired license, saying it will be up to Birch Burdick to determine whether to file criminal charges.

By DL News Staff

November 08, 2010 at 7:49 AM

 Share

Fargo police are withholding details of their investigative findings into a Red River Women's Clinic doctor with an expired license, saying it will be up to Birch Burdick to determine whether to file criminal charges.

Burdick, the Cass County state's attorney, plans to review police reports, now complete, after officers inquired about Dr. Tami Lynn Holst Thorndike, a physician at the clinic whose North Dakota medical license expired June 30.

More than two dozen calls from the public were placed to police once it became known Thorndike's license expired.

The downtown Fargo clinic is the only one in North Dakota that performs abortions. State law requires abortions be performed by a licensed physician, and failure to comply with the statute is a misdemeanor or felony.

Thorndike has active medical licenses in her resident state, Colorado, and in South Dakota.

The investigation isn't considered complete because it hasn't been reviewed by prosecutors, and Police Chief Keith Ternes wouldn't say late last week whether officers determined if Thorndike performed abortions in North Dakota after her license expired.

"We're ready to forward our report to the state's attorney's office for review," said Ternes, adding that the investigation was prompted last week when "a citizen brought it to our attention."

Tammi Kromenaker, director of the Red River Women's Clinic, would not disclose whether Thorndike performed abortions at the clinic after her license expired. Thorndike practices at the clinic six times a year and is not scheduled to return this year, Kromenaker said.

Since a story of the pending investigation was published in The Forum, Fargo Police Sgt. Mark Lykken said he personally received 30 calls requesting an investigation or that the police act to close the clinic, which they do not have the power to do.

Lykken said the calls likely stemmed from a possible chain e-mail circulating to abortion protestors. However, Lykken said he has been pleasantly surprised that all calls he received remained polite and courteous.

Officers have looked into when Thorndike performed abortions in the state.

"That certainly was one of the aspects that the investigation thoroughly examined," Ternes said, adding that the decision of whether to charge someone with a crime rests with prosecutors.

Burdick said he must review police reports to determine if charges are appropriate. He said he has not dealt with possible criminal sanctions involving a medical license but has faced the issue with nurses whose licenses had expired.

In those cases, Burdick said, warning letters from his office informing nurses that they must immediately stop practicing or renew their licenses resolved the issue, and there were no criminal charges.

"I never heard about any of those again," he said of nurses given warnings.

Kromenaker said the expiration of Thorndike's North Dakota license was an "administrative oversight" and the doctor is working with the licensing board to renew. Thorndike was not available for comment.

"This is a paperwork matter and not a reflection of her abilities or competency as a physician," Kromenaker said. "She has never had a black mark on her record."

Kromenaker said the clinic cooperated with the police investigation.


"I expect to have full resolution with no problem," she said.

Duane Houdek, executive secretary of the North Dakota Board of Medical Examiners, which licenses physicians, said the legal penalty for late license renewals is to pay triple the normal fee, which is \$150.

"From our point of view, a lapsed license is typically something that is taken care of administratively," Houdek said, adding that he cannot recall a case in which a lapsed medical license led to criminal charges.

The medical board will meet Nov. 19 and likely discuss the case, he said.

"I don't think it's uncommon to have a professional license expire," Ternes said, but added the abortion issue makes the Thorndike case unusual and higher profile.

 Share