

Doctor gets 6 months in abortion patient death

By DENISE LAVOIE
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A doctor was sentenced Tuesday to six months in jail after pleading guilty to involuntary manslaughter in the case of a woman who died after he performed an abortion on her.

Dr. Rapin Osathanondh, who is originally from Thailand, was sentenced in the 2007 death of Laura Hope Smith, 22. He pleaded guilty Monday, just as his trial was about to begin.

Under a sentencing recommendation that prosecutors and Osathanondh's attorneys agreed to, he was sentenced to six months, but will be eligible for parole after serving three months. His jail term will be followed by nine months of home confinement with electronic monitoring. He had faced a maximum of 20 years. He is also banned from working as a doctor or teaching medicine ever again.

Smith was 13 weeks pregnant when she went to see Osathanondh for an abortion in his Cape Cod office. She was pronounced dead later that day.

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Prosecutors charged Osathanondh with manslaughter, alleging that he failed to monitor her while she was under anesthesia, delayed calling emergency services when her heart stopped, and later lied to try to cover up his actions.

Osathanondh, who was also a research associate at the Harvard School of Public Health, resigned his medical license the same day the state Board of Registration in Medicine issued a scathing list of charges against him, alleging that he had "engaged in conduct that calls into question his competence to practice medicine."

The board said Osathanondh did not have any means of monitoring Smith's heart, and did not have oxygen or a functioning blood pressure cuff in the room during Smith's abortion. The board also alleged that he "failed to adhere to basic cardiac life support protocol" and did not call an ambulance in a timely manner.

Smith's father, Tom Smith, described how he and his wife, Eileen, adopted Laura after she was left in an orphanage in her native Honduras and later abused by an American couple. He said she studied cosmetology in high school, sang in a choral group and was in demand to sing the national anthem at school ball games.

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"You, sir, destroyed a precious flower that grew and ... blossomed in our lives, not accidentally,

but purposely," he said, looking directly at Osathanondh.

Smith's mother, Eileen, said her faith in the medical community has been shattered by Osathanondh's actions. "No family should have to go through this," she said.

Osathanondh, 67, who is originally from Thailand, had been licensed to practice medicine in Massachusetts since 1974.

He did not speak in court Tuesday, but his lawyer, Paul Cirel, said Osathanondh had expressed "most profound remorse and regret for Laura Smith's death."

Cirel said Osathanondh came to the United States in the 1960s and had performed thousands of safe abortions before Smith's death.

"This is regrettably — terribly — the one complication, the one problem that ever came up in his practice," Cirel said.

David Angueira, an attorney who represented Smith's family in a medical malpractice lawsuit, said the case was settled Tuesday for \$2 million.

Eileen Smith was asked by a reporter if she was happy to see Osathanondh taken away in handcuffs to begin serving his sentence.

"Nobody won. Laura got justice, but it's a tragedy all the way around," she said.

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