

Christian GP who performed exorcism on patient is struck off

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A Christian GP has been struck off after he took a mentally ill patient to his church to perform an exorcism, and told her she would be cursed if she reported him.

The Medical Practitioners Tribunal Service concluded that Dr Thomas O'Brien was a "risk to the public" and that he had "repeatedly breached professional boundaries." The doctor was found guilty of serious misconduct by the tribunal.

Professor Tim Hendra, who chaired the tribunal, said: "Dr O'Brien shows no insight or empathy towards patient A but has rather adopted a combative approach which is entirely unjustified and unacceptable.

"The panel is in no doubt that conduct such as this is completely inappropriate and would be viewed as deplorable by the general public and the profession."

Dr O'Brien did not attend the hearing in person, and said, in a written statement: "Maybe patient A has no mental problems or psychotic illness, but likes telling lies for effect, and enjoys inventing and twisting stories to harm others?"

During his interactions with Patient A, Dr O'Brien told her that "God is her surgeon and God will heal her." Patient A, who suffered from depression and was reportedly suicidal, claims that Dr O'Brien told her to stop taking her anti-depressants for "religious reasons" and said that psychiatrists "do the devil's work."

Terry Sanderson, President of the National Secular Society, said: "It is reassuring that a person such as this is no longer working as a doctor. Let's hope there aren't many others in the NHS who share his rather extreme view of what religion can achieve in a medical setting."

Dr O'Brien performed an exorcism on Patient A during a four-hour "testimony" at his church, and admitted visiting the patient's home. Patient A became convinced that her medical problems were the result of demonic possession. General Medical Council member Peter Atherton said that Patient A "was made to feel as if all things going wrong were due to the devil."

The patient reported that the doctor gave her religious pamphlets, including a book called "An Occult Checklist", written by Dr O'Brien, and which included a "prayer of repentance" that Patient A felt pressured to sign by the doctor and his wife.

Dr Antony Lempert of the Secular Medical Forum said that Dr O'Brien's behaviour represented "a wilful disregard of the trusting relationship between patients and their doctor."

Dr Lempert added; "It is never acceptable for a doctor, working in a trusted professional capacity, to abuse their professional position by trying to change a patient's own personal beliefs. The distress caused to this patient, suffering from physical and psychological symptoms yet subjected to a campaign of religious intrusion and exorcism by the person supposed to be caring for them is

difficult to imagine.

"Over recent years, we have seen other Christian doctors, such as Dr Richard Scott and Dr Antonia Johnson, who also considered patients fair game in their mission to evangelise and proselytise to the world. These doctors have no place in a profession dedicated to caring for and supporting patients in the context of evidence-based, compassionate medicine based around patients' own beliefs and requirements... It would have been nice to hear a few words of compassion for the patient from Dr O'Brien rather than the continued laments about his own feelings and beliefs."

Dr O'Brien said, "I know true justice will be done one day and no-one can escape from that" and added that "God knows everything and will judge fairly."

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