

Vaca dentists lose licenses, reprimanded

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A four-year investigation into the negligent practices of a former Vacaville dentist has left two dentists without their licenses and two more reprimanded by the Board of Dental Examiners.

Former dentist Gregory Hughes' license was revoked because of "numerous counts of unprofessional conduct, including gross negligence, incompetence, repeated negligent acts, dishonesty, fraud, deceit and patient abandonment, involving 15 orthodontic patients," according to the board's press release distributed Tuesday.

Hughes, who made waves in the local dental community in the mid-1980s with his controversial involvement with the church of Scientology, closed his Vacaville practice in 1988 without notice and left dozens of patients without dental care.

The Church of Scientology, founded by L. Ron Hubbard, is based on Dianetics, which is also the title of a book by Hubbard that advocates methods of achieving mental and physical health.

According to Larry Ballard, the dental board's chief of enforcement, Hughes was often absent from his practice, leaving three associates to treat his patients on the spur of the moment.

Because of their association

with Hughes, Drs. Louis Heller, Steven Lynch and Ronald Milla were also charged with neglect. Heller surrendered his license. Lynch and Milla, who run private practices, were reprimanded, temporarily prohibited from practicing orthodontics and must pay \$20,000 in restitution to 15 patients.

"It's an unfortunate thing," Milla said. "I just hope people get restitution and it all goes away."

"Dr. Hughes unfortunately hurt a lot of people," Lynch said. "I'm happy to help some of the patients who were hurt, even though I personally never met most of them. I believe it is a positive solution."

Both said they went to work for Hughes after graduating from dental school. When they realized Hughes' neglect, they expressed concerns to other dentists. Lynch said he was ultimately fired for defending patients' concerns to Hughes.

In late 1986, Hughes closed up shop and started a Southern California dental management company that held seminars on "How to Build a Million Dollar Dental Practice."

Hughes, who Ballard said is the subject of numerous outstanding civil suits, agreed to the revocation of his dental license. He could not be reached for comment Tuesday.

Sterling founder