

LONG ISLAND / **INVESTIGATIONS**

NEWSDAY INVESTIGATION

NYS failed to discipline dozens of Long Island doctors for months or years after misconduct

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'We're all shattered in many different ways'

Despite arrests, complaints, convictions and judgments, 46 physicians were allowed to practice freely. NewsdayTV's Macy Egeland and reporters from Newsday's health and investigative teams have the story.

By David Olson and Arielle Martinez

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Law enforcement arrested Dr. Frank Pollaro in January 2024 after seizing his laptop with thousands of images and videos of children as young as 4 years old being sexually abused by adults.

It wasn't the first time.

Federal agents caught the Babylon cardiologist with similar child sexual abuse material [in 2009](#), and he pleaded guilty. But the New York State Health Department's physician discipline board allowed him to continue practicing for 15 years after that first arrest.

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Pollaro is one of 46 doctors on Long Island who held New York medical licenses without restrictions or penalties for months or years despite criminal convictions, felony arrests, civil judgments, other states' disciplinary actions, bans on treating Medicaid patients, legal settlements that involved fines or sexual abuse allegations, a Newsday investigation found.

WHAT NEWSDAY FOUND

- **New York's physician discipline system** has allowed doctors with criminal convictions and misconduct allegations to continue practicing, often without restrictions.
- **The state has taken fewer disciplinary actions** against doctors over the past decade, with a shift toward education and remediation rather than serious sanctions.
- **The state agency that investigates complaints**, the Office of Professional Medical Conduct, saw its budget decline over the past 10 years, while the number of physicians increased 22%.

New York's disciplinary system allowed the physicians to practice freely after they were found guilty or liable or settled claims for a variety of offenses. Those include illegally distributing opioids, fabricating patient records and billing patients for unnecessary, sometimes painful tests. [Multiple doctors](#) allegedly billed Medicaid or Medicare for [more than 24 hours](#) of appointments in a single day. [Another pleaded guilty](#) to receiving tickets to Katy Perry and Justin Bieber concerts and Mets games as kickbacks in exchange for steering blood samples to a preferred laboratory. One physician was found with empty alcohol cans in exam rooms, authorities said.

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The investigation found the state disciplines fewer doctors than it did a decade ago and has taken a remediation approach over punishment in dealing with wayward physicians. In 24 of the 46 cases, there is no record of action taken against the doctor. In at least nine other cases, the discipline board went against state Health Department staff recommendations to revoke

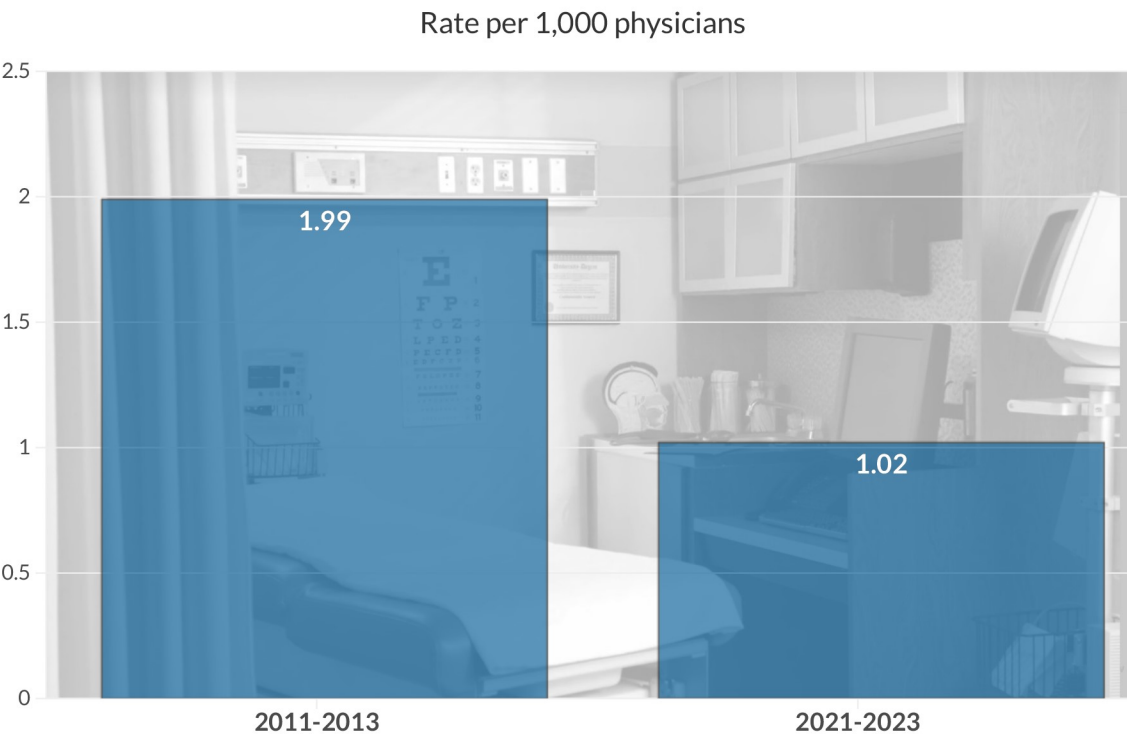
physicians' licenses for what they called severe misconduct.

New York's system for disciplining doctors who commit misconduct puts patients in peril, Newsday found after reviewing thousands of pages of records and interviewing more than 90 doctors, state regulators, attorneys, experts and patients.

The state received at least 7,900 complaints a year between 2013 and 2023, but the discipline board took no more than 440 final actions annually, records show.

The number of serious disciplinary actions the state took against physicians plunged even as the number of doctors in New York rose, a Newsday analysis of federal data found. The rate of serious actions fell by half over the decade ending in 2023, from a three-year average of 1.99 per 1,000 doctors to an average of 1.02 per 1,000. Actions defined as serious include revocations, suspensions and restrictions on a doctor's ability to practice.

Sharp decline in state's serious disciplinary actions against doctors



Source: Newsday analysis of data from the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) National Practitioner Data Bank (NPDB) Public Use Data File, the Federation of State Medical Boards (FSMB) Physician Census for the median year of each three-year period, and the Public Citizen Health Research Group.

Experts say a possible explanation is the state agency that investigates complaints, the Office of Professional Medical Conduct, saw its budget decline over the past 10 years, while the number of physicians increased 22%. There are [nearly 16,200](#) licensed physicians with primary mailing addresses on Long Island alone.

Dr. Thomas T. Lee, chairman of the state Board for Professional Medical Conduct, which acts on the office's findings, said it increasingly prefers a nonpunitive approach toward doctors accused of misconduct. He said the system is fair, and each case is unique and "deliberated methodically in accordance with the laws."

The increasing reliance on education and non-disciplinary warnings, rather than serious sanctions, can be more effective in ensuring physicians follow laws and regulations, Lee said.

"The public benefits from improved physician education and remediation," he said.

Yet in some cases involving allegations of egregious conduct, the state took no action and, afterward, dozens of patients said they were harmed.

The board should be "protecting the public from incompetent or miscreant physicians," said Robert E. Oshel, a former associate director for research and disputes for the National Practitioner Data Bank, a federal repository that compiles physician misconduct reports. "As it is now, typically, the benefit of the doubt goes to the physician, so the public is not being protected from the ones that are really causing the problem."

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These 46 LI doctors were allowed to practice freely for months, years after misconduct

Name	Specialty	Location*	Actionable event	Event date	NY board action**	Days between actionable event and NY board's first action	Response to requests for comment
Alam, Hamid M. Morshedul	Diagnostic Radiology	Jericho	Pleaded guilty to health care fraud.	12/19/22	Had his license suspended for three years, but the suspension was stayed in full. He was also fined \$30,000 and placed on probation for three years with terms including a practice and billing monitor and continuing medical education.	57	Referred all questions to his attorney, Jordan Fensterman, who declined to comment.
Asare, Emmanuel Opare	Internal Medicine	Roslyn Heights	Was found by a judge to have violated the Americans with Disabilities Act.	08/06/20	None		Did not respond to requests for comment. Attorney Steven Warshawsky declined to comment.
Barnard, Morris	Internal Medicine	Great Neck	Pleaded guilty to health care fraud.	03/07/22	Was placed on a non-disciplinary restriction to practice only with a billing monitor until further action by the state health department in June 2022. In September 2023, he had his license suspended for four years and was required to complete 30 hours of continuing medical education in ethics during the suspension. He will be placed on probation for five years with terms including a billing monitor after the suspension. He is also permanently	108	Did not respond to requests for comment.

limited to practicing only in a group setting of three or more practicing physicians.

Source: Newsday analysis of TruthMD data and public records. • * Reflects Long Island locations listed on

Perforated colon, wrongly removed kidney



More than a year and a half after New Jersey made Dr. Greg Saggio surrender his license after two botched surgeries, New York barred him from performing surgeries but allowed him to keep his license. Saggio now teaches at NYIT's College of Osteopathic Medicine in Old Westbury. Credit: nyit.edu

The state has the power to penalize “physicians whose practice of medicine is seriously deficient or who are dishonest or impaired,” the state Health Department says.

[Complaints against physicians](#) are filed with and investigated by the health department’s Office of Professional Medical Conduct. If there’s sufficient evidence of misconduct, the case goes to discipline board committees that by law must have two physicians and one nondoctor.

In a 2-1 vote, both physicians on a three-member committee cleared Dr. Stuart Copperman, then a Merrick pediatrician, in 1987 of allegations he sexually abused patients. It wasn’t until 13 years later [that the state revoked his license](#). The state concluded he had continued to abuse patients during that time. A state civil court judge in 2023 [found him liable](#) of sexual abuse against 104 girls and women.

Copperman did not defend himself in any of the hearings and the liability judgment against him was by default.

Copperman in the past denied he abused any patient.

In other cases, the board never acted, despite legal judgments that found doctors had violated the law. A federal judge in 2020 concluded Dr. Emmanuel Asare, who has practiced in Roslyn Heights and Manhattan, had violated the Americans with Disabilities Act by refusing to treat Mark Milano and two other men because they were HIV-positive or perceived to be. Milano, 69, said it was “disappointing and frustrating” that the board never acted or even posted the judgment on its website, despite him notifying the state of the ruling.

Asare, 65, did not respond to requests for comment.

Some doctors were disciplined in other states, but it took months or years for New York to act. New Jersey's medical board made Dr. Greg Saggio [surrender his license](#) in 2009 after it investigated two of his surgeries — one that led to the unplanned removal of a kidney, records show, and another that led to a perforated colon and permanent colostomy.

New York's board did not take action against Saggio until 554 days after New Jersey acted, [when it barred him](#) from performing surgeries but allowed him to keep his license. He is now a professor at the New York Institute of Technology College of Osteopathic Medicine in Old Westbury, preparing others to become doctors.

Carol Wilkins, 69, who said she almost died after Saggio perforated her colon and later reached a civil settlement with him, said in an interview she was outraged Saggio is teaching at a medical school.

"He should have lost his license permanently after me," she said.

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On a recent afternoon in her Cape Coral, Florida, front yard, she displayed for Newsday the colostomy bag she has had to wear since Saggio operated on her. The former registered nurse, who can't be on her feet for long and must lie down regularly, struggles to make ends meet because she has been unable to work since the surgery. Walking and bending over can be painful.

"He destroyed me," Wilkins said. "I had a normal life and now I don't."

Saggio, 58, declined to comment for this story.

Saggio has been a full-time faculty member at the NYIT medical school since 2006, said the school's dean, Dr. Nicole Wadsworth. He currently is an associate professor there. Elizabeth Sullivan, an NYIT spokeswoman, said in a



Carol Wilkins has a permanent colostomy after a surgery performed by Dr. Greg Saggio in 2002. Credit: Newsday/Alejandra Villa Loarca

statement the university “became aware of” Saggio’s disciplinary history and the two surgeries, “but we can’t clearly say when we became aware,” including whether it was before NYIT hired him.

Wadsworth, in a statement, said Saggio only teaches first- and second-year students, primarily as a lecturer, and he is not involved in surgical training.

Wilkins said Saggio was to only remove her gallbladder in the surgery. As a nurse, she realized something was wrong when she wasn’t feeling better the next day. Gangrene had developed in her gut.

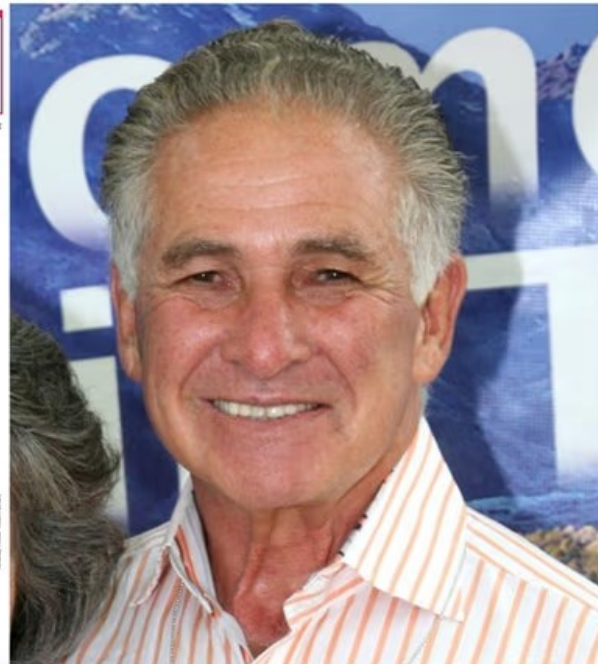
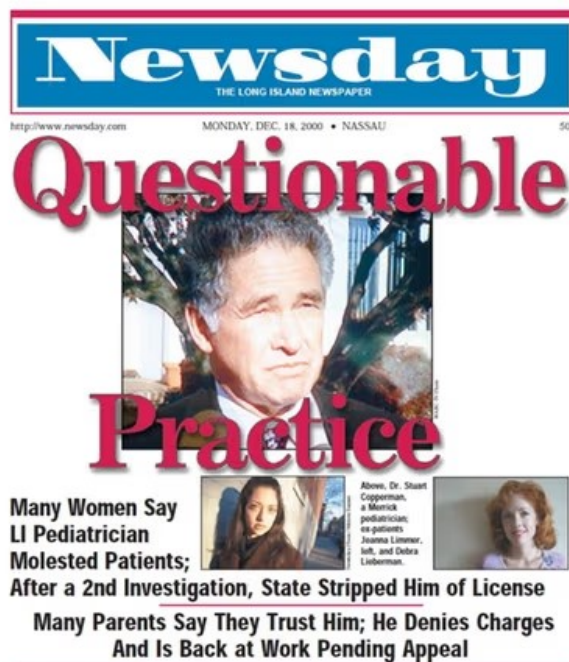
Wilkins said while in the hospital, she asked Saggio, “ ‘Did you puncture my bowel?’ He said, ‘No. No way. There’s no chance of that.’ ”

After several days in the hospital, “I said, ‘I’m going to die if I don’t get out of here,’ ” and she transferred herself to another hospital. A surgeon at the other hospital “saved my life” because she was having “multisystem organ failure” due to an infection.

She said the \$300,000 legal settlement she accepted cannot come close to making up for the decades of lost income. She said she survives on Social Security. Publicly available documents do not reflect whether Saggio admitted wrongdoing as part of the settlement or disciplinary proceedings.

Wilkins said Saggio should not be teaching students “who are going to go out and do what he’s teaching them to do.”

More than 100 civil lawsuits



Dr. Stuart Copperman featured on the cover of Newsday’s Dec. 18, 2000, edition and at an event in 2010. Credit: Newsday; SocietyAllure.com/Rob Rich

Hundreds of men and women have come forward in recent years to accuse two Long Island doctors, Copperman and urologist Dr. Darius Paduch, of sexual abuse.

The civil claims against Copperman, 89, filed under the [2019 Child Victims Act](#), alleged the abuse began in the early 1960s and continued for nearly 40 years until the state revoked his license.

Jeanna Limmer and her mother reported Copperman to Nassau County police in 1984, after Limmer said she was abused from age 13 to 15, according to police records retained at her family's Wantagh home. But no criminal charges were filed, police said.

In 1985, Limmer, now Jeanna Salgado, filed a complaint against him with the state Office of Professional Medical Conduct, records show. In 1987, a discipline board committee acquitted Copperman, despite what Salgado said were "very similar stories" she and another girl — whom she had never met — told the board.

Newsday does not publish the names of sexual assault victims without their permission.

"When I found out that they were going to let him continue practicing, the thing I was most upset about was, I said to my mom, 'If he's done this to me, and my friend, and to this other girl, God only knows how many other girls he's doing this to, and how many more he's going to do this to,'" Salgado, 56, recalled as she sat in her Manhattan apartment. She said she still has flashbacks of Copperman abusing her.



Jeanna Salgado, left, and Beth Maffei were teenage patients of Dr. Stuart Copperman. Credit: Newsday/Alejandra Villa Loarca

One of the six women who filed complaints in the 2000 revocation case, Beth Maffei, 56, said the board's 1987 acquittal encouraged Copperman to abuse girls and young women like herself because he thought he could get away with it.

Maffei said it didn't surprise her that, as Salgado and court documents said, the two physicians on the committee voted to exonerate Copperman and the nondactor, a minister, voted against him. Doctors want to protect each other, she said.

"I feel they were just looking out for him," said Maffei, known as Beth Handelman while growing up in Seaford. She spoke recently from the Lake Worth, Florida, house where she lives with her husband, only 16 miles from Copperman's home in Boca Raton.

Copperman did not respond to multiple requests for comment over the past year, including phone calls and a request for an interview when Newsday traveled to his gated community in Florida. When reached by phone last year, he declined to comment. A current lawyer is not listed for him in court documents.

'Patients were their last thought'

In 2018, a man filed a sexual abuse complaint with the state against Paduch, 57, who at the time was working in Manhattan but moved to a Northwell Health office in Great Neck in 2020, according to Northwell.

The man's attorney, Mallory Allen, said he sought Paduch's help because he was experiencing groin pain. The man alleged in 2006 and 2007, Paduch sexually abused him. Hundreds of other men alleged similar abuse.

The state took no disciplinary action against Paduch until a month after [his April 2023 arrest](#) for sexual abuse by federal agents and other law enforcement. [In May 2023](#), state Health Commissioner Dr. James McDonald temporarily suspended his license pending further board proceedings. In August 2023, the discipline board issued an order temporarily barring Paduch from practicing medicine. It was technically "non-disciplinary" because the board had not taken a final action.

In May 2024, a federal jury [found Paduch guilty](#) of 11 felonies connected to the sexual abuse of five minors and two adults. He agreed to surrender his medical license [in December](#), after he was [sentenced to life in prison](#).

After sentencing, his attorney, Michael Baldassare, filed an appeal and said, "[Dr. Paduch maintains his innocence](#) and we hope that he will one day be vindicated." Reached earlier this year, Baldassare declined further comment.

Allen represents 143 men — including the 2018 complainant — in civil cases against health care systems where Paduch practiced, New Hyde Park-based Northwell and New York-Presbyterian and Weill Cornell Medicine in Manhattan. More than 50 clients were abused after the 2018 complaint was filed, she said.

Allen said her client told her the state did not appear to take his complaint seriously, conducting only a brief interview and never informing him of the result.

James O'Connell, 38, of Maspeth, Queens, said Paduch sexually abused him beginning in March 2021, three years after the complaint was filed with the state.



Dr. Darius Paduch was convicted in 2024 on 11 counts of sexually abusing patients. Credit: US Attorney's Office, Southern District



James O'Connell was a patient of Dr. Darius Paduch's in 2021. Credit: Newsday/Alejandra Villa Loarca

He said if the health department had acted upon the 2018 complaint, he may never have been abused.

"It's obvious that the patients were their last thought, if you get a complaint like that across your desk and you don't do anything about it," he said.

Health department officials declined to comment on the specifics of any investigation. State law prohibits discussing or providing details of an investigation or complaint beyond what is on the state's physician discipline website, officials said. The website only includes cases that result in formal charges, discipline or orders that are non-disciplinary but can result in what are, in effect, license suspensions. It does not include complaints that do not lead to formal charges or many details of investigations that do lead to charges.

Northwell and Weill Cornell declined to directly respond to the allegations, citing the ongoing litigation. Northwell said in a statement Paduch came to Northwell in 2020 "with a stellar reputation in the field of urology," and the health system was "appalled by the deeply disturbing allegations." Weill Cornell said in statements it hired outside attorneys to conduct an investigation and look into additional patient safeguards, and expanded a program for "medical chaperones" to accompany patients to some doctor visits. New York-Presbyterian referred questions to Weill Cornell, stating Paduch was employed by Weill Cornell.

'An emergency situation'



Dr. Frank Pollaro, center, is sentenced in 2024 on two counts of possessing child pornography. James Pascarella, his attorney, is in front. Credit: John Roca

It's unclear how the Office of Professional Medical Conduct became aware of Pollaro, the doctor who has twice pleaded guilty to charges of possessing child sexual abuse images. The office is required to investigate any formal complaint, but it also can launch investigations based on newspaper articles, court cases or other sources, said William Comiskey, a former OPMC supervising attorney.

[Newsday reported](#) Pollaro's first child sexual abuse material arrest in 2009, five years before the discipline board limited his practice to patients 19 and older. He pleaded guilty in 2011. The board suspended Pollaro's license for three years starting in 2014, but that suspension was stayed, meaning it didn't go into effect, and he was put on probation for five years.

IN THE MATTER
OF
FRANK THOMAS POLLARO, M.D.

CONSENT
ORDER

Pursuant to N.Y. Pub. Health Law § 230-a(9), I shall be placed on probation for 60 months, subject to the terms set forth in attached Exhibit "B", and until such time as Respondent complies with all terms, restrictions, limitations, and penalties, and any changes or amendments thereto, imposed by the United States District Court, Eastern District of New York, with regard to the conviction set forth in Paragraph A of the Statement of Charges, attached hereto as Exhibit "A".

Pursuant to N.Y. Pub. Health Law § 230-a(3), my license to practice medicine in New York State shall be limited to preclude treatment of patients eighteen (18) years of age or younger.

A 2014 order from the state Board for Professional Medical Conduct detailing terms of Dr. Frank Pollaro's discipline.

The state could have prevented Pollaro, 56, from practicing, or restricted him to treating only adults, almost immediately after his arrest. The health commissioner, upon the recommendation of the discipline board, has the power to temporarily stop a doctor from practicing in serious cases.

In Pollaro's case, allowing a doctor who admitted possessing child sexual abuse material to continue practicing, and giving him the right to examine and touch children's bodies for years, put kids at risk, said Stefan Turkheimer, vice president for public policy for the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, which operates the National Sexual Assault Hotline.

Pollaro's 2009 arrest should have been "an emergency situation" for the discipline board, he said.

"There's no reason in my mind the board shouldn't say, 'Well, on an interim basis, you can't be treating children,'" Turkheimer said.

Allen Bode, who prosecuted Pollaro in the 2009 federal case, said he would have expected the discipline board to have given Pollaro a more severe penalty, such as stopping him from practicing entirely, especially following Pollaro's formal sentencing in 2016.

“Consuming child pornography is a very serious crime, and in the federal system, it’s considered a violent felony, because of the damage that’s inflicted on children,” he said. “I would be surprised that the state licensing board does not have more serious repercussions for a serious felony.”

Read more



NY's doctor discipline system is too freely for investigations, attorney says

Since this discipline act of 1961, discipline of physicians has declined 35% over a decade even as the number of physicians rose.

Bode now works as the chief assistant district attorney for Suffolk County District Attorney Ray Tierney.

Pollaro's Mineola attorney, James Pascarella, declined to comment on his client's case.

Although Pollaro pleaded guilty, the judge in the case delayed his sentencing until 2016 to allow him to perform community service for 5 years, instead of imposing a sentence of up to 10 years in prison. Bode said he “objected vehemently” to community service and argued for prison time. But U.S. District Court Judge Leonard Wexler said he hoped Pollaro could be rehabilitated.

In Pollaro's most recent criminal case, Suffolk County Court Judge Karen M. Wilutis on Sept. 9 [sentenced him](#) to 4 to 8 years in prison. As part of a plea deal, he agreed to surrender his medical license.

After the sentencing, [Tierney said it was “inconceivable”](#) that the board let Pollaro keep his license after his federal conviction.

Turkheimer said that after Pollaro pleaded guilty in 2011, the board's failure to act was “a dereliction of duty.”

“New York clearly needs to get with the program in their physician discipline,” Bode said. “Physicians are in a position of trust. And it's something that, if you're abusing that trust, there ought to be consequences.”

If you are a victim of sexual abuse or assault, the National Sexual Assault Hotline offers confidential 24-hour support: 800-656-4673 or chat online at online.rainn.org.

If you want to file a complaint against a physician licensed in New York, go to:

https://www.health.ny.gov/professionals/doctors/conduct/file_a_complaint.htm

HOW WE REPORTED THE STORY

TruthMD, a Georgia-based company that collects and disseminates data on health care providers, supplied physician records from its extensive database to identify cases for Newsday of doctors who had at least one Long Island address and some type of sanction from a government agency — for example, a disciplinary action from a state medical board, a Medicare or Medicaid exclusion, or a criminal record. Newsday analyzed and verified all records and data.

From there, Newsday's analysis found which of those doctors had not been disciplined by the New York medical conduct board until months or years after the initial sanction, or at all. Even doctors convicted of felonies maintained unblemished licenses. Newsday reporters attempted to contact the 44 physicians connected to the cases and their attorneys.

Newsday also identified two Long Island physicians who each had more than 100 plaintiffs file lawsuits against them by analyzing the dockets of lawsuits filed under the 2022 Adult Survivors Act and the 2019 Child Victims Act in the databases of the state court system and county clerks' offices. Both laws allowed alleged victims of sexual abuse to file civil lawsuits for actions that occurred before the statute of limitations had expired, and the Child Victims Act expanded the statute of limitations. Newsday tried to contact them and their attorneys.

By David Olson and Arielle Martinez

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[See 46 LI doctors who were allowed to practice despite misconduct](#)



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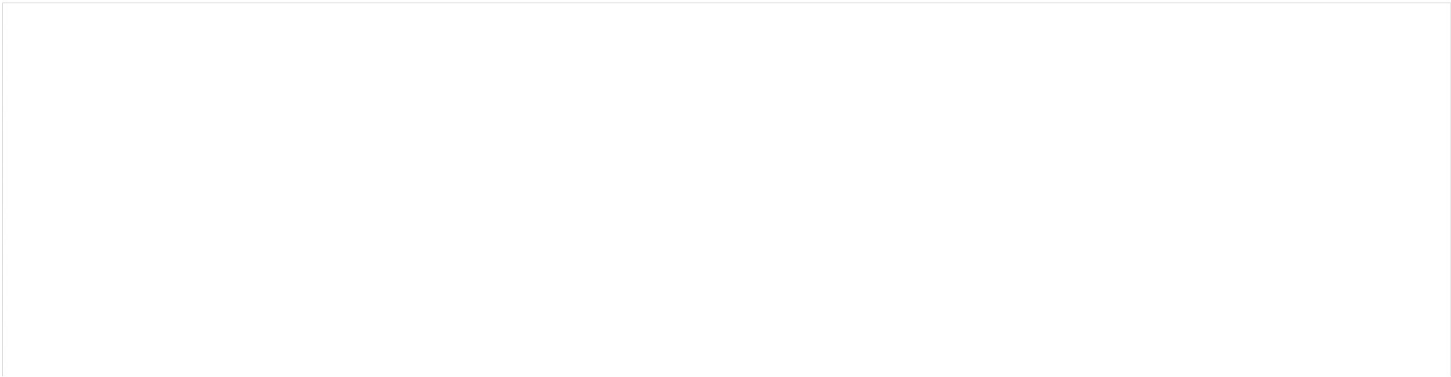
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