

Ex-state hospital worker sentenced in escape, smuggling

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By Ruth Liao • Statesman Journal
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A former Oregon State Hospital employee will spend four months in jail for helping a patient escape and later smuggling drugs to another patient with whom she had a romantic relationship.



Bonita Tucker, 30, pleaded guilty Friday to second-degree escape, supplying contraband, delivering a controlled substance and possession of a controlled substance.

Circuit Judge Joseph Guimond sentenced Tucker to four months in jail and two years of probation.

“This was a blatant violation of a position of trust and which placed a great risk to the community,” Guimond said.

The convictions stem from two separate episodes in 2007, one when Tucker was employed as a mental health therapist with the state hospital and one that happened after she resigned from her job, said Marion County Deputy District Attorney Paige Clarkson.

Oregon State Police Detective Greg Withers gave testimony in court Friday about the investigation.

Tucker was convicted for aiding and abetting the escape of forensic patient Gino A. Puglisi, who escaped Feb. 14, 2007, after he cut through a security fence with bolt cutters. He was caught in Beaverton nine days later. Another patient, David Anderson, also was planning to escape but remained in the facility.

Tucker resigned from her job March 23.

Withers said investigators learned of the romantic relationship between Tucker and Anderson, including unconfirmed reports of Tucker flying to Texas and marrying Anderson by phone.

“It just fueled the fire,” he said. “She just wouldn’t give up.”

After Tucker had resigned from Oregon State Hospital, Anderson received a large FedEx package. When authorities inspected its contents, they found a large comforter with a small, six-inch plastic bag lined with morphine and amphetamine pills sewn inside a seam, Withers said.

The package recipient listed the name of a woman from Reedsport but included a 503 area code. Knowing that Reedsport’s area code is 541, Withers traced the package’s tracking number and found the Salem drop-off location where it was first taken. Withers then reviewed surveillance video of the FedEx business and was able to identify Tucker on the video tape.

Fingerprints also were found on the plastic inside the comforter, confirmed through Oregon State Police laboratory tests, Withers said.

Clarkson recommended a six-month jail sentence because of the severity of Tucker’s involvement.

Tucker’s retained attorney Keith Hayes asked the court not to impose jail time, but instead lengthen the amount of required community service hours.

In front of the judge, Tucker said she knew her relationship with Anderson was inappropriate, but she didn’t know why she continued it.

“I didn’t know what made me cross the line,” she said.

Tucker said she realizes now that Anderson was manipulative in persuading her to help with the escape and later smuggling in the drugs. She said she filed for a divorce and supports a court order that would bar contact with Anderson.

Tucker’s mother, Shirley Tucker, and Lakepoint Community Church pastor Sarah Page both spoke in support of Tucker.

As part of the conviction, Tucker also surrendered her certified nursing assistant’s license.

Guimond allowed Tucker to keep her driver’s license, instead of imposing a six-month automatic suspension required on most drug convictions.

But Guimond said he could not ignore the fact that she was a state employee paid to care for a vulnerable population.

“It gives me no joy to place you in jail at all,” he said.

Also on Friday, Anderson was convicted of second-degree escape and supplying contraband. Anderson already faces 47 months in prison after being convicted of using a minor in delivering drugs and identity theft while at the state hospital, Clarkson said.

Anderson was convicted and sentenced to 30 additional months in prison, to serve consecutively after he finishes his time under the Psychiatric Security Review Board. He declined to comment in court.

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