

# Clinic falsely told dozens they had Alzheimer's, suits say

February 8 2017, by John Seewer

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In this Thursday, Jan. 26, 2017, photo, Kay Taynor holds a photo of her late husband, Gary, in Toledo, Ohio. Dozens of patients from a now-closed memory loss clinic in Ohio say its director told them they had Alzheimer's disease when they really didn't. More than 50 people have sued, saying they thought for months they had the mind-robbing disease. Taynor was diagnosed with Alzheimer's on her second visit to clinic director Sherry-Ann Jenkins and then referred five or six friends and family members to her office, including her husband of 48 years. All were told they had the disease, she said, but her husband, Gary, took it hardest. (AP Photo/Paul Sancya)

Shawn Blazsek knew a string of concussions from high school football and boxing was catching up with him. He would go days without sleeping and was forgetting how to tie his shoes. Still, at age 33, he was stunned when told he had Alzheimer's disease.

He started planning out who would take care of his four kids if something happened to his wife, and thought about how hard it would be for them when he could no longer recognize his family. So he stuffed fistfuls of sleeping pills into a bottle and wrote himself a note, vowing to swallow all of them when he wasn't able to remember the names of his children.

That day never came. Nine months later, he learned that the memory-loss center director who diagnosed him didn't have a medical or psychology license needed to do so. Then another test confirmed he did not have Alzheimer's.

He is one of more than 50 people suing the now-closed clinic's former director and its owner, saying they, too, were told they had Alzheimer's or another form of dementia. Most now know it's not true, while a few are awaiting confirmation.

Some say they spent months undergoing treatment while planning out their final years. Some quit their jobs, sold possessions or took one last special trip. One killed himself.

Blazsek crammed years of fatherly advice into a matter of months, showing his son how to check the oil on a car and teaching his wife about the household finances.

"I was preparing her to be a single mom," he said.

The couple figured he had no more than 10 years to live and even less time before his memory was gone.



This Thursday, Jan. 26, 2017, photo shows Shawn Blazsek in his home in Toledo, Ohio. Blazsek was stunned after being told he had Alzheimer's disease. Nine months later, he learned that the memory-loss center director who diagnosed him didn't have a medical or psychology license needed to do so. Then another test confirmed he did not have Alzheimer's. (AP Photo/Paul Sancya)

"Here I am, thinking I'm going to be a widow at 43. What am I going to do?" said his wife, Jennifer. "Who's going to teach my boys how to shave? Who's going to play ball with them?"

So far, the case has yet to result in any charges against Sherry-Ann Jenkins, who opened the Toledo Clinic Cognitive Center in early 2015

through the Toledo Clinic, a multi-specialty medical center with more than 150 doctors.

Attorneys on both sides would not say whether there is a criminal investigation, although court records indicate the Ohio Medical Board has talked with some of the patients.

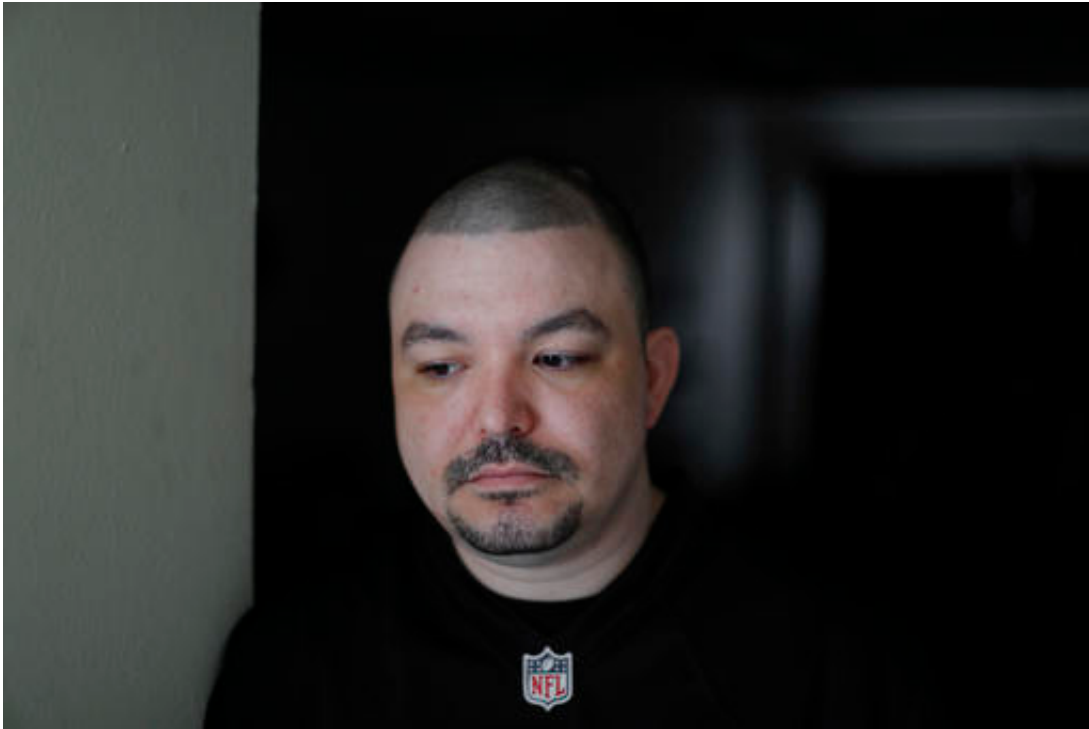
The lawsuits say that Jenkins, who has a doctorate degree in physiological science, wasn't authorized to order medical tests and that her husband, a licensed doctor who is a partner in the Toledo Clinic, signed off on the tests and was sometimes listed as the referring physician on billing even though he did not see any of the patients.

An attorney for the couple would not answer questions about the cognitive clinic, which abruptly shut down after about a year in early 2016. Jenkins and her husband did not respond to messages seeking comment.

In court filings responding to the lawsuits, each of which seeks more than \$1 million in damages, their attorney did not dispute that Jenkins was unlicensed but denied most of the other allegations.

The former patients have sued the Toledo Clinic, as well, saying it should have known Jenkins lacked the training and credentials to treat and diagnose patients. Michael D'Eramo, chief administrative officer of the Toledo Clinic, said he could not comment.

Some describe her as compassionate and easy to talk with, saying she ended therapy sessions by telling them to give her a hug. At her suggestion, a few patients appeared in articles touting the benefits of her holistic treatments, which included memory games and daily doses of coconut oil. But they also say she fought hard against medication and getting a second opinion.



This Thursday, Jan. 26, 2017, photo shows Shawn Blazsek in his home in Toledo, Ohio. Blazsek was stunned after being told he had Alzheimer's disease. Nine months later, he learned that the memory-loss center director who diagnosed him didn't have a medical or psychology license needed to do so. Then another test confirmed he did not have Alzheimer's. (AP Photo/Paul Sancya)

Nearly all of those diagnosed by Jenkins began seeing her after suffering traumatic brain injuries or worsening cognitive issue. Some, like Blazsek, are continuing treatment with other doctors.

Attorney David Zoll, who is representing those suing Jenkins, said that it's not clear how many patients she saw and that others might not know they were misdiagnosed with Alzheimer's. More than 30 people added their names to the lawsuits late last month.

He said he believes she was motivated by greed, saying several patients

were overbilled. The cognitive clinic grew rapidly, he noted.

"Many times she would see the first person and have them bring in their whole family," Zoll said. "And many times she would diagnose the whole family."

Kay Taynor was diagnosed with Alzheimer's on her second visit to Jenkins and then referred five or six friends and family members to her office, including her husband of 48 years. All were told they had the disease, she said, but her husband, Gary, took it hardest.

"He's got a smile that just lights up the room, and I never saw it again," she said. "He just sunk in his chair. To me, he never stood up again. He was never tall again. He gave up."

Gary fell into depression, spending his final weeks sitting in a chair with his hands in his lap until he went into their garage and shot himself in the head, she said. An autopsy did not show any signs of Alzheimer's, she said.

Don Tanner said he, too, felt like taking his own life.





This Tuesday, Dec. 4, 2001 photo shows former clinic director Sherry-Ann Jenkins in her home in Ottawa Hills, Ohio. Dozens of patients are suing Jenkins of the memory-loss clinic, accusing her of falsely telling them they had Alzheimer's disease when in fact they did not. Most of them spent months believing they had the mind-robbing disease, some quit their jobs, sold possessions, took one last special trip and one became so depressed he killed himself. (Jetta Frase/The Blade via AP)

He was sent to the clinic for therapy in February 2015 after suffering a severe brain injury in a fall. The trauma of healing while dealing with the devastating diagnosis of Alzheimer's became unbearable.

"She gave me a death sentence," said Tanner, who told his wife he wanted to jump off a bridge and then thought about wandering off into the marsh behind their home with his gun.

He had seen firsthand how Alzheimer's gradually erodes someone while caring for his dad. He spent many days shaving and dressing his father, who died only months before Tanner's own diagnosis.

"It was just cemented in my mind that I wasn't going to put my family through that," he said.

His wife enlisted their daughters and friends to stay with him while she was at work, fearing what she'd find when she returned. "If he had a bad day, I didn't know where that would send him," said his wife, Monica.

It wasn't until last summer—after the clinic had closed—that a new doctor told him there was no way he had Alzheimer's.

"God must have been on my side, because I didn't go out there and get that damn gun," Tanner said. "But man I thought of it. Something kept telling me it's not there yet."

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