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**HEADLINE:** CHURCH, HOSPITAL TRADE BLAME OVER PRIESTS;  
INSTITUTE CLAIMS ITS REPORTS ON ABUSERS WERE MISUSED

**BYLINE:** Eric Rich and Elizabeth Hamilton, National Correspondents

**BODY:**

A nationally renowned psychiatric hospital that for years has treated clergy accused of sexual misconduct now says it was deceived by the Roman Catholic Church into providing reports that the church used to keep abusive priests in the ministry.

The church sometimes concealed information about past complaints against clergy sent for treatment and disregarded warnings that the hospital's evaluations should not determine a priest's fitness for parish work, doctors at the Institute of Living in Hartford, Conn., said in interviews.

As a result, the institute may have unwittingly provided the clinical cover cited by New York Cardinal Edward Egan and other church officials as their reason for not suspending some accused priests, including such now-notorious figures as the defrocked John Geoghan in Boston, accused of molesting more than 130 people.

"In some cases, necessary and pertinent information related to prior sexual misconduct has been withheld from us," said Dr. Harold I. Schwartz, the institute's chief of psychiatry. "In some cases, it would appear that our evaluations have been misconstrued in order to return priests to ministry."

Schwartz spoke of the "surprise we have experienced, to learn only recently as these scandals were emerging in the press, that in so many instances we have been providing treatment to individuals while being so inadequately informed."

He said the institute has decided to require that the church attest, in writing, that it has disclosed any past allegations against priests referred for treatment.

That the Institute of Living would make such accusations about the Roman Catholic Church is extraordinary.

As one of the first major psychiatric hospitals to introduce concepts of spirituality to the treatment of clergy, the institute became unusually close to the church. Scores of priests from all over the country have been treated there, priests have worked for the institute, and one of its doctors was even knighted by Pope Pius XII in 1951.

The institute's criticisms of the church underscore the depth of unease among doctors, as it becomes increasingly apparent that various diocesan officials have

invoked their evaluations, time and again, as the reason for allowing abusive priests to continue working.

Just Saturday, in his annual pastoral letter, Egan again cited the institute in defending his handling of sex-abuse cases during his tenure as bishop of the Bridgeport, Conn., diocese. He said it was his policy to send priests facing allegations "immediately to one of the most prominent psychiatric institutions in the nation for evaluation."

"If the conclusions were favorable, he was returned to ministry, in some cases with restrictions, so as to be doubly careful," Egan said. "If they were not favorable, he was not allowed to function as a priest."

But Leslie Lothstein, the institute's director of psychology, said the church frequently ignored doctors' advice when deciding whether to return abusive priests to work.

"I found that they rarely followed our recommendations," Lothstein said. "They would put them back into work where they still had access to vulnerable populations."

The institute's claims -- made in interviews conducted before Egan issued his statement Saturday -- raise questions about the church's motives and expectations when seeking treatment.

Court documents reviewed by The Hartford Courant --which contain sealed pretrial testimony from the settled Bridgeport cases -- show that the diocese never referred sex-abuse allegations against a priest to civil authorities for investigation. Instead, church officials made clear they thought that an evaluation at the institute would determine the truth of an accusation.

Egan said during a 1999 deposition that he could take little action against an accused priest if doctors did not substantiate the complaint.

A case in point is the Rev. Raymond Pcolka, whom Egan sent to the Institute of Living in 1989, after a mother accused Pcolka of molesting her son years earlier. Egan testified that "an expert of some renown" at the institute concluded "that there was no reason for us to hesitate to allow this person to continue his duty."

What the institute hadn't been told is that Pcolka faced another complaint, six years earlier, that he molested a 7-year-old girl. Egan told lawyers during his deposition that a 1983 letter containing that accusation had gone missing from Pcolka's personnel file at the diocese.

A spokesman for Egan at the Archdiocese of New York, where Egan was elevated to cardinal last year, did not respond to calls seeking comment. Attorney Joseph Sweeney, who represented Egan during the Bridgeport lawsuits, defended the former bishop's use of the institute's evaluations.

Egan, he said, consulted the Institute of Living every time a priest was accused of sexual misconduct and never went against the advice of professionals there. Sweeney said Egan used his own judgment when deciding whether to remove priests from active ministry, adding that recommendations from doctors were "not the sole factor," but were "probably the most significant factor."

But a 1990 letter shows that the hospital long ago warned Egan's top aide in Bridgeport, the Rev. Laurence Bronkiewicz, that the church should not rely on its evaluations in deciding whether to remove a priest from ministry. The letter, written by an institute administrator, Dr. Howard Iger, said, "we certainly are in a weak position when we try to make predictions about future behavior."

To be sure, it is difficult to assess the Institute of Living's belated claim that it has been misled. The hospital would not point to specific cases in which the church allegedly withheld information, saying it is prevented by confidentiality laws.

Also, documents show that the institute sometimes did offer assurances that certain priests could return to parish work -- even, in Geoghan's case, after diagnosing the priest as having "atypical pedophilia in remission." Five years after the institute wrote the Archdiocese of Boston in 1990 that Geoghan was "psychologically fit" to continue working with children, he was again accused of molesting a boy.

One former psychiatrist who worked at the hospital called Schwartz's accusations against the church "self-serving" and said that in the 1980s, when the institute was struggling financially, it viewed the treatment of clergy as a profitable niche. "These were good patients for the institute," the psychiatrist said. "The diocese paid cash."

**GRAPHIC:** PHOTO: Egan

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