

Embezzler took from orthodontists

Longtime office manager sentenced this week

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- By Tony Tagliavia

HOLLAND TOWNSHIP, Mich. (WOOD) - When orthodontist Dr. Daniel George learned his longtime office manager had stolen tens of thousands of dollars from his father-and-daughter practice, he said his blood "ran cold."

"I just couldn't believe it," he remembered. "We have been such a tight-knit organization all these years. We were like families to each other."

But Rhonda Wilson admitted it in court.

The 58-year-old, who had worked at the practice for 28 years, pleaded guilty to taking money from the practice of Dr. George and his daughter, Dr. Cadie George. Wilson was charged with stealing the funds from 2007 through 2010.

So how did she avoid getting caught?

"That's the question," Dr. Cadie George said. "Because again, we thought we had all bases covered. We had an accountant who comes in and looks at our books every month, so I feel if it can happen to us, it can really happen anywhere."

American Dental Association studies have found 17.5% of dentists said they were embezzlement victims in 2007 and 2008, compared to 11.9% in 1996.

The doctors said they believed Wilson took the money in part by skimming from cash deposits and by disguising payments to herself as payments to vendors.

In exchange for her guilty plea, court records show prosecutors agreed to maintain the charge against Wilson as embezzlement between \$50,000 and \$100,000. They said they would not press the more serious charge of embezzlement over \$100,000.

Still, Wilson was ordered to pay restitution of about \$180,415.04 this week. And she was sentenced to eight months in jail and three years of probation.

Dr. Cadie George said she worries such a sentence does not fit the crime.

"It's the same as a bank robber going to a bank and stealing without a gun. How is it different? She left almost daily with cash," she said.

She was set to meet Friday with other orthodontists over lunch to discuss how it happened to her and her father -- and what they can do to stop it.

"And literally since I've started talking about it to people, I've had more people come up to me and call me at home and say, you know, this happened to us," Dr. Cadie George said.

"A lot of people aren't prosecuting because it's embarrassing. You think, 'How could we be so dumb that we missed this? What's wrong with us? How come we feel so bad about it?' When really, the embarrassment shouldn't be on us. It should be on the perpetrator. It should be on Rhonda. She should be embarrassed about it."



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"It's not that it's our fault," she said. "It's her fault for taking advantage of our trusting situation."

In asking for a probation-only sentence, Wilson's lawyer wrote that she was "embarrassed."

"Mrs. Wilson takes full responsibility for the criminal acts she has committed," the attorney wrote. "She makes no excuses. She knows she was wrong."