

VIRGINIA ACTS OF ASSEMBLY -- 1998 SESSION

CHAPTER 314

An Act to amend and reenact § 8.01-399 of the Code of Virginia, relating to communications between attorneys and physicians.

[S 414]

Approved April 9, 1998

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That § 8.01-399 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 8.01-399. Communications between physicians and patients.

A. Except at the request or with the consent of the patient, no duly licensed practitioner of any branch of the healing arts shall be required to testify in any civil action, respecting any information which he may have acquired in attending, examining or treating the patient in a professional capacity.

B. Notwithstanding subsection A, when the physical or mental condition of the patient is at issue in a civil action, facts communicated to, or otherwise learned by, such practitioner in connection with such attendance, examination or treatment shall be disclosed but only in discovery pursuant to the Rules of Court or through testimony at the trial of the action. In addition, disclosure may be ordered when a court, in the exercise of sound discretion, deems it necessary to the proper administration of justice. However, no disclosure of facts communicated to, or otherwise learned by, such practitioner shall occur if the court determines, upon the request of the patient, that such facts are not relevant to the subject matter involved in the pending action or do not appear to be reasonably calculated to lead to the discovery of admissible evidence.

C. This section shall not (i) be construed to repeal or otherwise affect the provisions of § 65.2-607 relating to privileged communications between physicians and surgeons and employees under the Workers' Compensation Act or (ii) apply to information communicated to any such practitioner in an effort unlawfully to procure a narcotic drug, or unlawfully to procure the administration of any such drug.

D. Neither a lawyer, nor anyone acting on the lawyer's behalf, shall obtain, in connection with pending or threatened litigation, information from a practitioner of any branch of the healing arts without the consent of the patient, except through discovery pursuant to the Rules of the Court as herein provided. *However, the prohibition of this subsection shall not apply to:*

1. *Communication between a lawyer retained to represent a practitioner of the healing arts, or that lawyer's agent, and that practitioner's employers, partners, agents, servants, employees, co-employees or others for whom, at law, the practitioner is or may be liable or who, at law, are or may be liable for the practitioner's acts or omissions;*

2. *Information about a patient provided to a lawyer or his agent by a practitioner of the healing arts employed by that lawyer to examine or evaluate the patient in accordance with Rule 4:10 of the Rules of the Supreme Court; or*

3. *Contact between a lawyer or his agent and a nonphysician employee or agent of a practitioner of healing arts for any of the following purposes: (i) scheduling appearances, (ii) requesting a written recitation by the practitioner of handwritten records obtained by the lawyer or his agent from the practitioner, provided the request is made in writing and, if litigation is pending, a copy of the request and the practitioner's response is provided simultaneously to the patient or his attorney, (iii) obtaining information necessary to obtain service upon the practitioner in pending litigation, (iv) determining when records summoned will be provided by the practitioner or his agent, (v) determining what patient records the practitioner possesses in order to summons records in pending litigation, (vi) explaining any summons which the lawyer or his agent caused to be issued and served on the practitioner, (vii) verifying dates the practitioner treated the patient, provided that if litigation is pending the information obtained by the lawyer or his agent is promptly given, in writing, to the patient or his attorney, (viii) determining charges by the practitioner for appearance at a deposition or to testify before any tribunal or administrative body, or (ix) providing to or obtaining from the practitioner directions to a place to which he is or will be summoned to give testimony.*

E. A clinical psychologist duly licensed under the provisions of Chapter 36 (§ 54.1-3600 et seq.) of Title 54.1 shall be considered a practitioner of a branch of the healing arts within the meaning of this section.

F. Nothing herein shall prevent a duly licensed practitioner of the healing arts from disclosing any information which he may have acquired in attending, examining or treating a patient in a professional capacity where such disclosure is necessary in connection with the care of the patient, the protection or enforcement of the practitioner's legal rights including such rights with respect to medical malpractice actions, or the operations of a health care facility or health maintenance organization or in order to

comply with state or federal law.