

TRIBUNE WATCHDOG UPDATES

Sex offenders will lose their medical licenses

By MEGAN TWOHEY
Tribune reporter

Doctors and other health care workers convicted of sex crimes, forcible felonies or battery of a patient will be permanently stripped of their medical licenses in Illinois under a sweeping new law.

Gov. Pat Quinn signed the measure Thursday in response to a Tribune investigation that found predatory doctors, even those convicted of crimes, often faced little or no punishment from state regulators, said his spokeswoman, Brooke Anderson.

"The governor wants patients to feel safe and to be safe," she said. "After the things that were brought to light in the Tribune, he supported the bill."

The Tribune investigation found:

■ At least 16 registered sex offenders held physician or chiropractor licenses within the last 15 years, and not one had his license permanently revoked following

conviction.

■ A doctor convicted of sexual abuse of a patient was not disciplined by the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation in any way.

■ Physicians who battered patients were often placed on the agency's overburdened probation program that provided little oversight.

sight.

Hailed by victim advocates, the law, which takes effect in 30 days, will affect all types of health care workers, including dentists, nurses and podiatrists, said Sue Hofer, spokeswoman for the professional regulation department.

Besides felonies, those convicted of misdemeanor

battery in the course of providing care or misdemeanor sex crimes, no matter who the victim is, will be prohibited from practicing.

Prosecutors must immediately notify regulators when they charge a health care worker with such crimes. Those with pending cases can treat patients only in the presence of another

health care worker, and patients must receive written notice that makes clear the worker is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

"This will help ensure that any patient seeking medical care should be fully informed about the safety of that care and that offenders are held accountable," said Polly Poskin, director of the

Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault, which helped craft the law.

It's unclear whether health care workers already convicted of such crimes can lose their license or whether it only applies to those convicted after the law takes effect.

mtwohey@tribune.com