

Man gets term of 46 months in aloe vera case

By **Laurie Willis**
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A Finksburg man who authorities say treated more than 3,000 critically ill patients with an aloe vera concoction was sentenced yesterday to 46 months in federal prison, one year of supervised probation and ordered to pay \$222,506 in restitution.

U.S. District Judge William M. Nickerson also ordered Allen J. Hoffman, 55, to refrain from the sale, distribution or marketing of aloe vera or cesium chloride as a treatment for cancer and other diseases and not to engage in any activity involving the treatment of patients.

Hoffman is to begin serving his sentence on Jan. 15.

He pleaded guilty Sept. 21 in U.S. District Court in Baltimore to two felony counts of introducing an unapproved new drug into interstate commerce with the intent to defraud the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

A federal jury acquitted him in June of last year of one count of mail fraud and deadlocked on 19 other charges after a two-month trial.

Prosecutors said that Hoffman, through his Baltimore-based T-Up Inc., treated patients with T-Up, a mixture of aloe vera, a natural substance found in many lotions, and cesium chloride, a compound that can trigger irregular heart rhythms in animals. It was never approved by the FDA.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Virginia Evans argued that Hoffman should receive 51 months in prison, the maximum allowed under a plea agreement reached with Hoffman's court-appointed attorney, Richard D. Bennett.

"We consider this to be a very substantial conviction for our office," Evans said. "We feel like the judge considered all of the facts and believed that the defendant defrauded the cancer patients."

Reading a statement, Hoffman said he never intended to defraud anyone.

"Despite all of the bad things which the government attributes to me, I want you to know that I believe to the depths of my soul in the benefit of aloe vera and cesium chloride in the treatment of cancer and other diseases," Hoffman said, his voice cracking. "I recognize that this zealous belief caused me to engage in activity with others that results in my being here today. ... I was not driven by greed but by wishful thinking and a lack of insight and critical judgment."

Bennett said Hoffman was destitute and couldn't afford restitution, but he was ordered to pay \$100 a month during his incarceration and while he's on probation. The money is to be divided among 18 victims.

Hoffman's wife sat quietly through the trial. Also present were eight members of the jury that heard his case last year.

"We ... just wanted to see the outcome," said former juror Judy Howard.

Elva Williams, another former juror, added: "We all came because we wanted closure, and we wanted to make sure he doesn't practice any more medicine or harm any more people."

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