

CHIROPRACTOR FACES CHARGE

By Kim Martineau

March 6, 2008 at 5:00 AM EST

A local chiropractor has been charged with making prank phone calls to a Wethersfield stroke victim who wants chiropractors, like physicians, to be included on a state website that lets the public check their credentials.

Stephen Piserchia, 43, of Guilford, has been charged with second-degree harassment in connection with a series of bizarre messages left last spring on the home answering machine of Britt Harwe, founder of the Chiropractic Stroke Awareness Group.

The messages seem to mock those who have been hurt by chiropractic neck manipulations – what chiropractors call “adjustments.”

In one message, Piserchia said, “Hi, I’ll put my mother on. She had an adjustment, and I think she had a stroke. Hold on. Oh, that’s right, she can’t talk.” In other messages, Piserchia can be heard singing nonsensically, “Lo la la” and “kumbaya.”

Through caller ID, Harwe identified that the calls came from New Haven Medical, Sports and Occupational Health, which is owned by Piserchia. When interviewed by New Haven police, Piserchia freely admitted he made the calls.

“He was responding to the group’s unflattering comments regarding chiropractors,” Officer Mitchell Strickland said in his arrest warrant affidavit. “He describes the nature of his telephone calls as childish antics.”

Piserchia did not return a call for comment.

It was during a neck manipulation by a Rocky Hill chiropractor in 1993 that Harwe, then a young mother, had an artery in her neck crushed, triggering a stroke, she said. She had to learn to walk and talk again and today eats through a feeding tube and struggles with depression.

The group she founded claims several hundred members across the country who say they’ve also been hurt by chiropractors. Others who have spoken out, she said, have been retaliated against with harassing phone calls.

“They’re trying to silence us,” she said.

She initially filed a complaint with Wethersfield police, who investigated but did not bring charges after Piserchia promised not to make any more calls. She filed a separate complaint in New Haven, where Piserchia maintains his practice.

Piserchia, who was arrested on the misdemeanor charge Friday, will be arraigned March 13.