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Rosacea guru to end battle over critics' site

By Kevin Corcoran
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A Fishers physiologist whose online postings turned him into a guru for people suffering from rosacea agreed Thursday to abandon his legal fight to silence a Web site questioning his credentials and advice.

Published anonymously, the site claims Geoffrey Nase, 36, is practicing medicine without a license and dispensing potentially harmful advice to many thousands of people desperately seeking a cure for the tough-to-treat inflammatory skin disease.

About rosacea

Rosacea (pronounced roh-ZAY-sha) is a common disorder of the facial skin that afflicts about 14 million Americans.

There's no cure for the acne-like condition, which can cause severe redness of the cheeks, nose, chin or forehead; small visible blood vessels, bumps or pimples; and watery or irritated eyes.

A Web site that offers information about rosacea is:

- National Rosacea Society: rosacea.org.

The Web sites at issue in Marion Superior Court are:

- Geoffrey Nase's rosacea site: drnase.com.
- Anonymous site challenging Nase: www.seedwiki.com/wiki/debunkingnase.

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balance the critics' First Amendment rights against the potential harm to Nase's Internet business prospects.

The defendants -- Dr. Nicholas Soldo, an anesthesiologist from Scottsdale, Ariz., who uses lasers to treat rosacea, and one of Soldo's former patients, Laura Thomas, Asheville, N.C. -- say they can back up claims that Nase has inflated his credentials and dispensed harmful advice.

Both attended what was supposed to be a full-blown evidentiary hearing Thursday.

"Under no circumstances was that Web site coming down," Soldo said after the closed-door settlement talks. "It's too important to the rosacea community."

Online, the flare-ups between Nase and his critics have been dubbed the "Rosacea Wars" or "Nase wars" because of the way the caustic exchanges have roiled chat boards devoted to the disease.

Johnson said he did an online search during the settlement talks he initiated and found at least 10 pages of back-and-forth.

"I said, 'Geez, you guys have been really, really busy,'" Johnson said.

Nase estimates he has personally posted 55,000 individual messages touting rosacea research and offering free advice to sufferers within the past nine years. In addition, he ships his self-published paperback, "Beating Rosacea: Vascular, Ocular & Acne Forms," directly from his office for \$46.90 plus shipping and handling, according to Amazon.com.

Nase has a doctoral degree in microvascular physiology from West Virginia University's School of Medicine. Nase runs an

Rosacea flare-ups are difficult to treat and can cause purple, thickened skin, grotesquely enlarged and misshapen noses and, in extreme cases, blindness. Many rosacea sufferers develop deep psychological scars.

Nase -- who has made claims about himself that Indiana medical groups have refuted -- unmasked his cybercritics, and Thursday he tried to confront them in Marion Superior Court.

After several hours of attorneys for the Web site operators and Nase shuttling in and out of Judge Kenneth Johnson's office, both sides said they had reached an agreement in principle.

Nase's attorney, Vincent Perez, described it as a confidential settlement. However, Ronald J. Waicukauski, the attorney for the out-of-state Web site operators, said his clients would continue to maintain their online presence and that Nase agreed to drop his lawsuit by Jan. 31.

In court filings, Nase claims his online rosacea critics slandered him, interfered in his business pursuits and dried up sales of his self-published, 332-page book on the incurable and progressive acnelike disease. He had asked Johnson to order the Web site shut down immediately.

Nase has stated he filed the suit in mid-August to defend his reputation. The case would have required Johnson to

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online site called "drnase.com" for rosacea sufferers looking for alternative treatments.

Waicukauski told the court Nase "has ruthlessly attacked virtually anyone who disagrees with him." Soldo and Thomas are both ex-supporters of Nase who created the "DebunkingNase" Web site to challenge Nase's various claims.

They say they began to have doubts about him after he told his online supporters of a series of medical calamities this spring that included five gastrointestinal surgeries, the loss of 45 percent of his blood, heart attacks, major brain surgeries and a blood infection.

Yet, they say, Nase soon was back online. He even claimed to have done a business deal while in a coma.

During a deposition Sept. 30, Nase refused to answer questions about his medical treatment. He asked Johnson to block access to his medical records.

Thomas said she began checking other online claims Nase had made and uncovered inconsistencies in his background.

For instance, Nase has stated that "after detailed interviews and evaluation," Indiana's Medical Licensing Board had "granted Dr. Geoffrey Nase full privileges to offer in-depth consultations to rosacea sufferers." However, Michael Rinebold, the board's director, said Nase's claim is false.

Nase also has stated the Indiana State Medical Association gave him approval to call himself a rosacea specialist, to consult with patients over the Internet and to dispense medical advice. "I can tell you point-blank that is a bold-faced lie," said Adele Lash, the association's spokeswoman.

Nase did not return a call to his home Thursday seeking comment after the settlement was reached.

He has said his critics launched their Internet site after learning that he would be partnering with a dermatologist in Portland, Ore., who offers laser treatments for rosacea that would compete with Dr. Soldo's national practice. Nase received \$6,000 a month for referring people to the Oregon clinic -- a financial tie that critics say he failed to disclose.

Nase's online detractors say the arrangement -- and his decision to seek damages against the "DebunkingNase" site operators for lost income -- ran counter to online assertions that he has "never ever made a single penny for anything related to rosacea."

Call Star reporter Kevin Corcoran at (317) 444-2750.

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