

# Dr. Yasser Awaad's "children's epilepsy mill."

*A "medical nightmare" as the local pediatric neurology expert operated a years-long scheme to profit from unnecessary implant surgeries, medications and treatments that ruined children's lives and cost taxpayers millions of dollars.*

According to hundreds of distraught Michigan families Chief of Pediatric Neurology Dr. Yasser Awaad ran an epilepsy mill; falsely diagnosing thousands of Michigan children with epilepsy in order to collect hundreds of thousands of dollars in incentive payments from Oakwood Hospital, and from his own overbilling for services, medicines and devices.

Much of this money was paid for by taxpayers through Medicaid.

Children in his care –falsely diagnosed with epilepsy-- underwent unnecessary surgeries, received unnecessary implants, and were placed on dangerous drugs often repurposed for unapproved "off label" use. Dr. Awaad even misused implanted medication pumps by watering down the dosage so the pumps would require "very expensive" maintenance more often.

Some of the children had other serious medical problems that were left untreated due to Dr. Awaad's false diagnosis, causing yet more trauma for them and their families.

As a result of Dr. Awaad's epilepsy mill, misdiagnosed children were rendered "medicated zombies," some lost their hair, suffered serious pain and impairments and experienced other life altering side effects.

***"He took the best years of my daughter's life"***

***—parent Constance Reese***

Families of these children speak in terms of "lost years" of their children's lives. One young girl almost died after post-surgical infections from an unneeded surgical implant. Formerly good students were forced into special education programs at school, athletes were banned from sports and other extracurricular activities and teens were deprived of driver's licenses. [See the sidebar news stories for details of some of the children's stories.]



## Outrage Over Dr. Awaad's Epilepsy Mill For Children.

**MLIVE *Oakwood Doctor Accused of Falsely Diagnosing Children For Cash.***

**Crain's Detroit. *West Bloomfield doctor accused of misdiagnosing epilepsy in kids makes deal with state.***

**FOX News *Doctor Accused of Misdiagnosing Kids***

**People Magazine. *Misdiagnosed for Greed? Hundreds of parents say a Detroit doctor treated their children for nonexistent epilepsy so he could pocket insurance money.***

**Detroit News *Michigan board didn't act on doctor sanctions***

**Chicago Tribune *Doctor Accused of Poor Work Makes Deal With Michigan***

According to parents, Dr. Awaad threatened skeptical families with charges of child neglect and abuse if they refused to follow his medical advice or sought second opinions. He even warned parents to not have additional children based on his false diagnosis of their living children with epilepsy.

Dr. Awaad's threats carried weight. He was Chief of Pediatric Neurology at Oakwood Hospital and served on a nonprofit epilepsy advisory board. Dr. Awaad was the local expert on pediatric epilepsy, and doctors from the surrounding area referred many thousands of patients to him.

The total number of child victims of Dr. Awaad's epilepsy mill are still unknown due to foot dragging by Oakwood and Dr. Awaad, and a frustrating lack of action by the state and local health departments. No serious effort has been made by authorities to find or warn Awaad's thousands of child patients and their families.

***"We lived a nightmare" –Amber Lucas, who had 5 of her 6 children  
wrongly diagnosed with epilepsy by Dr. Awaad.***

So far more than 270 families from all over Wayne County have taken action against Dr. Awaad and Oakwood. But they are just the tip of the iceberg. Dr. Awaad's own legal defense has admitted to a potential 2,000 victims, an unknown number of whom could still be unaware of this crisis.

It is hard to believe that such a scheme could have operated undetected for so many years. In fact, by all indications Dr. Awaad's epilepsy mill was an open secret. But in Michigan, the law does not require doctors to report such dangerous practices and many doctors say there is an unspoken "code of silence" in the medical profession that discourages making complaints against fellow doctors. Since this scandal has become public a few doctors have quietly come forward to reveal they suspected Dr. Awaad was misdiagnosing children, and some even admit they stopped sending him referrals and ignored his diagnoses. Yet no one stepped in to stop him.

More shocking still, Oakwood Hospital –where Dr. Awaad was Chief of Pediatric Neurology—apparently benefitted from Dr. Awaad's malpractice. As far back as 2001 Oakwood renegotiated Dr. Awaad's contract under an incentive plan that rewarded him for increasing his epilepsy patient billing for Oakwood. Under this pay-to-play contract, Dr. Awaad received up to 50% of his hyperactive billing. During this time Dr. Awaad became the highest paid doctor at Oakwood, making over \$600,000 one year in a specialty where even hard-working doctors struggle to make 1/3 that salary. Much of Dr. Awaad's princely compensation was in the form of those "incentive payments" paid for his high volume of treatment.

In fact, Dr. Awaad was billing Medicaid for so many epilepsy treatments --a 200% increase during a single year-- the flood of billing triggered an internal audit and investigation by Medicaid. Oakwood settled quietly with Medicaid, reimbursing taxpayers over \$309,000 in charges for Dr. Awaad's services.

***"I was on the honor roll. But after I started these medications  
I was barely passing," Shana, a young patient of Dr. Awaad.  
"I was on about five different medications. Every time he'd switch me up,  
change it to something else, and every one I'd be lying in bed for days crying."***

Oakwood Hospital, in their own civil lawsuit fighting with Dr. Awaad over \$400,000 of his incentive pay, accuses him of 'negligence,' "misconduct," "breach of the standard of care," "fraudulent conduct" and "the doctrine of unclean hands" [meaning he himself was to blame]. Additionally Dr. Awaad has been under investigation by the

Michigan Department of Community Health since 2006, and by the F.B.I., as well as by Medicaid as previously mentioned.

However, now that the families of these misdiagnosed children have tried to take action, Oakwood has dug in its heels and publically stated it has “no reason to believe Dr. Awaad’s care and treatment resulted in any harm or injury during his tenure with Oakwood.” In the process of defending Dr. Awaad, Oakwood is playing hardball, asserting that misdiagnosed children were not harmed by unnecessary medications, surgical implants and treatments.

***“He told us not to have any more children because our other children would end up with epilepsy” –Angel Guy, mother of wrongly diagnosed Brian***

The State Board of Medicine also stalled and delayed, neglecting to act until high profile media coverage in the Detroit Free Press and FOX News forced a response from the Michigan Attorney General. Even then, the Board refused to address the public health emergency or the thousands of affected children, ignored all but 4 of the misdiagnosed children’s affidavits and complaints, and allowed Dr. Awaad to keep his medical license under a “Consent Order” where he agreed to a toothless probation and a de minimis \$10,000 fine.

In what families perceived as an especially callous gesture, Dr. Awaad’s years-long scheme was dismissed as a “mistake” by the Board of Medicine and this former Chief of Pediatric Neurology with over 35 years in the practice of medicine was judged to merely need some job skill training and so ordered take 20 hours of remedial education on reading diagnostics.

Dr. Awaad has reportedly fled to Saudi Arabia where he continues to practice medicine. Dr. Awaad maintains assets in Michigan including co-ownership of the Lake Orion Urgent Care Clinic, a home in Bloomfield Hills, and possibly another in northern Michigan.

Given the lack of a meaningful public health response, the failure of the State Board of Medicine to adequately discipline Dr. Awaad, and Oakwood Hospital’s decision to circle the wagons and stand by Dr. Awaad against the thousands of children he victimized, it appears there is no choice but to change Michigan law to mandate disincentives, punishments and mandatory reporting in such cases of outrageous medical malpractice against children at the taxpayers’ expense.