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## Leesburg doctor just wants to get back to work

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Dr. Pat Herrera just wants his life back. The Leesburg physician is on line to regain his license to practice medicine in a couple of weeks after being deprived of it during a three-year hiatus begun by the controversial painkiller oxycontin. "My life is saving lives and helping to heal people," Herrera said. "I did that for 14 years without one lawsuit, then suddenly I am blindsided by those who want to see my license withdrawn." Herrera owned an urgent care facility in Gadsden where part of his practice was pain management. Oxycontin was as common to pain management as aspirin to a headache until people began to abuse the drug. Abuse led to deaths and deaths led to a huge reaction against the drug. In 2001, Alabama's medical licensure board took Herrera's license.



Dr. Pat Herrera and office manager Deborah Bates are hoping to be seeing patients at Dr. Herrera's office within a couple of weeks.

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"I'm still reeling from that," Herrera said. "I still feel that I'm innocent but the main thing I want to do is to get back to medicine and I'll do whatever I need to do in order to reach that goal." Herrera got back to medicine in 2004 when a Montgomery court ruled the licensure board was wrong in his case and ordered it to return his license. He opened a practice in Leesburg, becoming the town's first medical doctor. The doctor was working six days a week seeing 12-21 patients a day for more than a year, not a complaint against him, when an Alabama appellate court reversed the Montgomery court and Herrera's license was again taken away. But the story is apparently headed for a happy ending. About six weeks ago, Herrera and the State Board of Medical Examiners reached a settlement agreement that will allow the doctor to regain his license and start practice as soon as a formal meeting can make the settlement official, then present it to the Medical Licensure Commission for its approval.

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His Leesburg patients, many of whom wrote letters on his behalf to the examining boards and to state officials, are happy about that. So, of course, is Dr. Herrera: "I'm just so thankful to finally put this behind me," he said. "The life that was taken from me is going to be returned and I hope to repay that account many times over."

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