

## Rage fueled clinic crash; Fitzgerald charged with three felonies

DAN SPRINGER | La Crosse Tribune | Posted: Thursday, July 20, 2006 12:00 am

Throughout his attack Friday on the Franciscan Skemp Clinic, Geoffrey Fitzgerald had one goal: To find the doctor he claimed endangered his life by refusing to run an HIV test almost two decades ago, according to a criminal complaint filed Wednesday.

As he drove his minivan toward the clinic, the 50-year-old Iowa man told a nurse he saw outside about his anger with Dr. David Onsrud.

After he plowed his vehicle into the clinic and barricaded himself in a second-floor room, Fitzgerald told police about his belief that Onsrud had failed to provide proper treatment and said he wanted to talk to the doctor.

Inside the clinic, Fitzgerald trashed the family practice area where Onsrud works. When he surrendered an hour later, he was wearing one of Onsrud's lab coats, according to the complaint.

Fitzgerald, of Dubuque, Iowa, was charged Wednesday in La Crosse County Circuit Court with felony counts of second-degree recklessly endangering safety, criminal damage to property and failure to comply with an officer's attempt to take a person into custody.

Prosecutors claim Fitzgerald did more than \$300,000 in damage to the clinic, 800 West Ave. S., by driving into the building about 6:15 a.m. and then vandalizing several offices and examination rooms.

In court Wednesday, public defender Elizabeth Wright tried to convince La Crosse County Circuit Judge Michael Mulroy to allow Fitzgerald out of jail with an order not to return to Wisconsin except for court hearings.

But Mulroy said that wasn't possible, ordering Fitzgerald held on a \$50,000 cash bond.

In October 1998, Fitzgerald filed a medical malpractice suit against Onsrud and another clinic doctor, Michael O'Brien, claiming he should have been tested for HIV in 1988 but wasn't until 1995, when he was found to have AIDS. The suit argued Fitzgerald would have had a more positive prognosis had he been tested earlier.

The case was dismissed after the defense argued that, among other things, Fitzgerald could not prove harm.

According to the criminal complaint, Fitzgerald was intoxicated from alcohol and prescription drugs when he drove around the clinic early Friday.

He nearly hit a nurse who was walking toward the clinic after parking her car. The nurse told police Fitzgerald stopped, rolled down the window and twice said, "Call the police, I'm mad at Onsrud."

Fitzgerald then drove away before returning to ram the minivan through the clinic's glass front, according to the complaint.

Once inside, Fitzgerald damaged about nine rooms on the second floor, overturning computer monitors, smashing and tearing medical equipment off walls and clogging several sinks so water ran into the hallway, according to the complaint.

He kept police at bay for 45 minutes by warning he had gasoline and matches and was prepared to set fire to himself and the clinic. When officers tried to force their way in, Fitzgerald yelled, "I'm dousing the gas right now all over the room," according to the complaint.

Officers said they later found all Fitzgerald had was matches, two packs of cigarettes and a bottle of beer.

Fitzgerald was taken to Gundersen Lutheran Medical Center, then to Mendota Mental Health Institute in Madison, where he remained until Tuesday afternoon.

During Wednesday's hearing, Fitzgerald appeared confused when Mulroy asked if he wanted a preliminary hearing delayed so he could hire an attorney, since he didn't qualify for a public defender after the initial appearance.

Fitzgerald, who has no serious criminal record, said he wanted to talk to his wife and family first, then said he didn't understand the question.

When he indicated he did want an attorney, Mulroy continued the case to 1:30 p.m. July 26.