

Doctor ends hospital privileges, shuts practice

By **LISE OLSEN**
Houston Chronicle

Ramesh Srungaram, a weight-loss surgeon for whom hospitals have settled 10 separate medical malpractice suits, has resigned his privileges at a local hospital and is closing his Houston practice.

Srungaram was the subject of a March 21 Houston Chronicle story about how doctors who have been disciplined by the Texas State Board of Medical Examiners often continue to practice at area hospitals.

Srungaram had resigned at two other hospitals, Cypress-Fairbanks Medical Center outside Houston and Highland hospital in Lubbock, and had seen a third, Memorial Hermann Northwest, close its weight-loss surgery program behind him before he was granted privileges by Houston Community Hospital in 2002.

Srungaram resigned from Houston Community Hospital on March 19, but a hospital spokeswoman who was contacted by the Chronicle that day was unaware of the resignation, according to Dan DeLaGarza, the hospital's administrator.

DeLaGarza also said the weight-loss

surgeon has shut down his practice. Phone calls last week and Thursday to Srungaram's office were not returned.

"I'm glad to hear he did shut his practice down, and that's something that said Gordon E. Davenport, an Alvin lawyer who represented the family of Donna Collins. Collins, one of Srungaram's former patients, died in 2003 after suffering complications from weight-loss surgery he performed. She was 40.

A Chronicle analysis of where doctors disciplined by the Texas State Board of Medical Examiners practiced counted seven disciplined doctors who worked at Houston Community in the last three years.

DeLaGarza said Houston Community Hospital now has only one disciplined doctor on its staff, orthopedic surgeon Merrimon Baker. Names of other doctors who have been recently disciplined by the state appear on the hospital's Web site, but DeLaGarza has said the Web site is out of date.

DeLaGarza said his hospital largely serves the poor, especially in its active emergency room, which he said served more than 24,000 people since the hospital opened in 2001. He said disciplined doctors who formerly worked at the

Disciplined by the State Board of Medical Examiners, **Ramesh Srungaram** still worked at Houston Community Hospital.



hospital either had minor problems or were screened by Northside General Hospital, the hospital's previous owners.

"Houston Community Hospital cannot be held responsible for the actions of the prior hospital at the same location," DeLaGarza said in a letter to his staff this week that was issued in response to the Chronicle story.

DeLaGarza also explained in the letter why he had defended Srungaram.

"Sometimes defending a doctor may not always be the popular thing to do, but is the right thing to do when you have all the facts," he wrote. "What hospitals should do is not judge its doctor by an allegation, what a hospital should do is base all of its decisions on facts."