Responses to Questions of the Indianapolis Star Re Fran Sepler
May 16, 2018

When did you first learn of the allegations against Nassar? Who told you?
On July 24, Fran Sepler learned of an allegation of abuse against Nassar from McKayla Maroney and reported it immediately to USA Gymnastics and its attorneys. See also Fran Sepler Statements April 12 and 20.

When were you hired to investigate the allegations?
In early July 2015, Ms. Sepler was retained by attorneys for USA Gymnastics to conduct an initial interview of Maggie Nichols, based upon a conversation involving Ms. Nichols overheard by a coach. Fran was retained forensically by a law firm to report what she learned and was instructed to keep the interviews confidential as to third parties. That was the agreement under which she was hired. Ms. Sepler had no prior relationship with USA Gymnastics,

Prior to agreeing to conduct the interview, Ms. Sepler sought and received assurance from USA Gymnastics that Nassar was not in contact with any athletes. At the beginning of each interview, Ms. Sepler reviewed a list of important points with the interviewees. Those points outlined her role in conducting each interview and specifically that she was not a law enforcement officer or an attorney. As is her practice, the interviewee then signs off on the document to acknowledge that they have been so advised. That is what happened here.

Did you report the allegations to law enforcement or child protective services? Why or why not? If yes, which agency?
Fran was hired to conduct one interview regarding a conversation overheard by a coach. She was not made aware of any specific allegations of abuse at the time she was hired. Her first two interviews did not include sufficient facts to reach a belief that abuse had occurred. However, within one hour of interviewing McKayla Maroney, Ms. Sepler reported to USA Gymnastics and Faegre Baker Daniels to call the police. Fran understands that law enforcement was contacted by USA Gymnastics the following business day. See Statements of April 12 and 20.

Are you a social worker? Were you acting as USA Gymnastics' designated agent?
Ms. Sepler is not a social worker. She was hired by Faegre Baker Daniels to conduct a forensic interview. She was not a mandatory reporter in this matter. See above and also Statements of April 12 and April 20.

Aly Raisman told us you met with her on July 17, 2015, in Massachusetts and that during that meeting she told you what Nassar had done to her.
Fran Sepler was not given sufficient facts to reach a belief that abuse had occurred until she interviewed McKayla Maroney. Ms. Raisman has stated publicly that she did not share information with Ms. Sepler and that she defended Nassar. Ms. Raisman did, however, encourage Ms. Sepler to speak to McKayla Maroney, who was described to Fran as Nassar's favorite. Ms. Sepler then promptly arranged to meet McKayla Maroney.

Did you report it to law enforcement? Why or why not?
Ms. Raisman did not allege sufficient facts in her interview for Fran Sepler to reach a belief that sexual abuse had occurred, and in fact Raisman vehemently denied it. If Ms. Raisman had alleged such facts in her interview, Ms. Sepler would have reported it immediately. Ms. Sepler did however accept Ms. Raisman's suggestion to interview McKayla Maroney and did so within days.

When did you learn that Aly Raisman wanted you to interview her again? What were you told? What did you do?
Ms. Sepler was not told by USA Gymnastics or anyone else in 2015 that Ms. Raisman wanted to be re-interviewed. Ms. Sepler has stated that had she been told that, she would have jumped on a plane immediately to meet her. Ms. Sepler had given Aly Raisman her business card and cell phone number and had texted with her before her interview. Aly Raisman never contacted Ms. Sepler to tell her that there was additional information she had not shared during the interview that she now wished to disclose. See also Statement of April 20.

The first Ms. Sepler learned that Aly Raisman wanted to be interviewed again was in media reports almost two years later.

Aly Raisman told us you tried to keep her from speaking about what happened. Is that accurate?
That is absolutely incorrect. Ms. Sepler didn't know Aly Raisman wanted to share additional information with her and she never intended to silence her. See Statement of April 20.

If so, why did your interaction with her differ from your recommendation for others? On your website, you advise people that "it should now be the exception to tell or suggest to a witness to refrain from discussing our interview or the investigation."
Ms. Sepler never told Ms. Raisman to be silent or to not discuss her interview. In the text message Ms. Sepler sent to Ms. Raisman, Ms. Sepler simply declined Ms. Raisman's offers to conduct her own inquiry with other gymnasts on Fran Sepler's behalf. There was no intention to silence Ms. Raisman. See also Statement of April 20.

On your website, you said you were a child sexual abuse specialist in Minnesota and have trained hundreds of organizations on sexual harassment and abuse prevention and reporting. What do you teach them to do about reporting allegations of child abuse?
The standards and obligations vary by state, as does the definition of mandatory reporter and organizations and individuals should comply with the state law obligations where the abuse is reported.

Are you aware that best practices in child welfare say to immediately report to authorities, rather than an organization conducting its own investigation?
In all instances mandatory reporters should absolutely follow the letter of the law with respect to their reporting. Beyond this, there is a distinction between retention of an individual (such as Fran Sepler here) by an attorney to conduct forensic interviews and those who are involved purely in child welfare. The conflicting obligations under a forensic retention are discussed in *Forensic Academy of Psychiatry and Law Online,* 3/20/2010(1) 49-56. The role of Fran Sepler was made clear at the outset of the interview that Ms. Sepler would report to USA Gymnastics and their legal counsel. The goal here was to learn whether there were sufficient facts to believe that abuse had occurred. Aly Raisman did not provide information in her interview supporting such a belief. A week later McKayla Maroney did.

In a prior statement, you said your role with USA Gymnastics "was limited to independently determine if concerns raised were legitimate." Isn't that the job of law enforcement and child protective services?
Fran Sepler was hired forensically by a law firm to interview one athlete to determine if the concerns overheard by a coach were legitimate. Ms. Sepler had not been previously aware of any allegations of abuse. Within less than two weeks, and as soon as the first athlete to allege facts indicative of abuse shared those facts with Ms. Sepler, she reported to the law firm within one hour. That was her obligation with the law firm. Ms. Sepler is not a mandatory reporter in this context, but did tell the law firm and USA Gymnastics to immediately contact law enforcement based upon information provided in the final interview.

Is there anything you would do differently?
No.

Is there anything else you'd like to say, or you think people should know?
There is no plausible reason that Fran – who has spent her professional life working to protect women and children from abuse -- would try to silence anyone. The fact that she immediately called USA Gymnastics and their attorneys and told them to call the police following her interview with McKayla Maroney belies any suggestion to the contrary. Fran Sepler did her job. In less than two weeks, Fran Sepler was the one to unearth the egregious conduct of Dr. Nassar that we now know had been going on for decades. It is unfair that Ms. Sepler has been portrayed as one of those individuals who played a role in hiding the truth about Larry Nassar. But nothing could be further from the truth.

Statement of Fran Sepler to Dateline NBC
April 12, 2018

My foremost concern is for the victims of Dr. Nasser. My heart goes out to all of them for what they have suffered, and I applaud their courage in coming forward.

My role with USA Gymnastics was limited to independently determine if certain concerns raised were legitimate, and I determined in just a matter of days that they were. I was retained in July 2015 by USA Gymnastics to interview a single athlete to determine if there was reason to believe that sexual abuse had occurred. I was not hired to conduct a full-independent investigation.

I interviewed this first athlete on July 11, 2015, clearly stating that I had been retained by USA Gymnastics to look into remarks overheard by a coach. Although this interview did not present a clear case of abuse, I was concerned enough to press USA Gymnastics to conduct additional interviews. Within days, at my recommendation and urging, two more athletes were interviewed. The third athlete I interviewed -- an adult -- presented an unambiguous claim of sexual abuse. I promptly reported back to USA Gymnastics and recommended they immediately contact law enforcement. All three of my interviews were completed within 12 days in July 2015. I understand that USA Gymnastics then immediately contacted the FBI and my retention by USA Gymnastics was concluded.

Based upon the years I have worked with victims of abuse and my concern for those victims, I responded to the suggestion that one of the athletes wanted to initiate her own inquiry by cautioning this athlete and pointing out that the process was still underway. I regret that my communications have now been construed by some to have some other meaning. At no time did USA Gymnastics ask me to cover up any information or direct me to silence anybody. And, indeed, I did not attempt to silence anyone or hide anything. I told USA Gymnastics not what they perhaps hoped to hear, but what they needed to hear. Any suggestion my intent was to the contrary is belied by my instruction to USA Gymnastics, made immediately after the final interview, that my findings be reported to law enforcement.

I have spent the better part of my professional life working to protect children and others from sexual assault. I served for five years as the Child Sexual Abuse Specialist for the State of Minnesota, training law enforcement officers, child protection workers and mental health professionals regarding sexual abuse of children and how to interview them. I also served as the Co-Chair of the Minnesota Attorney General's task Force on Sexual Assault and today train hundreds of organizations on sexual harassment and abuse prevention and reporting. I am pleased that my limited involvement in this matter helped bring the egregious abuse to light so that Dr. Nasser has been stopped and punished and the victims can find justice and peace.

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Statement of Fran Sepler
April 20, 2018

The conclusions reached about the intent of my text message are understandable because Aly Raisman wasn't aware that USA Gymnastics had not told me about Aly's post-interview telephone call. I was not advised that Aly had requested another meeting with me or that Aly wanted to share more information, clarify her prior statements or provide additional names. Had I been made aware of Aly's phone call or apprised in any other way that Aly wanted to share more information, I would have jumped on a plane immediately to re-interview her. But that never happened because I wasn't aware that Aly had more she wanted to say.

The only information I received from USA Gymnastics after the interview was that Aly wanted to initiate her own inquiry with other athletes. I was told Aly wanted me to know that she would make calls on my behalf to other athletes. Based on that, I texted Aly thanking her for her interest, but explained to her that the investigative process was underway. I did not intend to silence Aly or anyone else and I was never told to do so. I am the one who pursued the interview with the third athlete within days after my interview with Aly leading to my conclusion -- which I immediately reported to USA Gymnastics -- that abuse had occurred and needed to be reported to law enforcement.

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