Beat: News

South Florida Pharmacy Tech Pleads Guilty to $40 Million Kickback Conspiracy

Targeting Military Health Care Programs

Miami, Florida, 20.05.2022, 18:07 Time

USPA NEWS - A former Palm Beach County pharmacy technician and high-level executive assistant has pleaded guilty to her role in a multi-million-dollar kickback conspiracy that defrauded Tricare and CHAMPVA through a South Florida compounding pharmacy. Tricare and CHAMPVA are the health care benefit programs for the United States Department of Defense and Department of Veterans Affairs.

In connection with pleading guilty to one count of conspiracy, Alisa Catoggio, 40, of Boca Raton, Florida, admitted that she was involved in a scheme that paid approximately $40 million in kickbacks to patient recruiters in exchange for their referring prescriptions issued to Tricare and CHAMPVA beneficiaries to a Broward compounding pharmacy. The prescriptions were for expensive pain creams, scar creams, vitamins, and other medically unnecessary compound drugs, which were reimbursed at amounts of up to $15,000 for a one month's supply. In addition, the Broward pharmacy did not charge the beneficiaries the mandatory co-payments for the drugs, which constituted another form of illicit kickback. The co-conspirators used phony charities to conceal this "no-copayment" kickback activity. The fraudulent billings caused a loss to the military health care program of approximately $88 million.

Sentencing is scheduled for August 9, at 2:00 p.m., before U.S. District Judge Roy K. Altman. Catoggio faces up to 5 years in federal prison.

U.S. Attorney Juan Antonio Gonzalez of the Southern District of Florida; Special Agent in Charge Cynthia A. Bruce, Department of Defense Inspector General's Defense Criminal Investigative Service (DCIS), Southeast Field Office; Special Agent in Charge David Spilker, Veterans Affairs, Office of Inspector General (VA-OIG), Southeast Field Office; Special Agent in Charge George L. Piro of the FBI Miami; and Special Agent in Charge Justin C. Fielder, FDA Office of Criminal Investigations' Miami Field Office, announced the guilty plea entered May 17.

The DCIS, VA-OIG, FBI, and the FDA, investigated the case.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Jon Juenger prosecuted the case. Assistant U.S. Attorney Daren Grove is handling the asset forfeiture component of the case.

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Wendy writes for the United States Press Agency and is a former columnist with the Fulton County Expositor, Wauseon, Ohio.

Source: Department of Justice, U.S. Attorney's Office, Southern District of Florida May 18, 2022

Article online:
https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-20821/south-florida-pharmacy-tech-pleads-guilty-to-40-million-kickback-conspiracy.html

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V.i.S.d.P. & Sect. 6 MDStV (German Interstate Media Services Agreement): Wendy Westhoven

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Official Federal Reg. No. 7442619