

Eli's Hospice Insider

Fraud & Abuse: Notorious Hospice Fraud Case Produces Guilty Plea At last

CEO ducks most obscene charges in deal.

Five years after federal raids and four years after multiple Novus and Optimum Health Services hospice personnel were indicted, the Frisco, Texas hospice's CEO has pled guilty in a fraud case that alleges tens of millions of dollars in false claims.

Bradley J. Harris, age 39, has admitted that from 2012 to 2016, he billed Medicare and Medicaid for hospice services that were not provided, that were not directed by a medical professional, or that were provided to patients who were not actually eligible for hospice, the Department of Justice says in a release. Harris "further admitted that he used blank, pre-signed controlled substance prescriptions to dole out potent drugs without physician input."



Two physician co-conspirators were paid \$150 kickbacks for each false certification of terminal illness and order they signed, Harris also admitted. And in an attempt to evade the aggregate hospice cap by enrolling an "influx" of new patients, Harris admitted to negotiating an agreement with a company called Express Medical that allowed him to access potential patients' confidential medical information in return for using Express Medical for lab and home health services, according to the DOJ. Harris' wife and other Novus staff then recruited those patients for Novus hospice services, regardless of whether they were eligible to receive benefits.

When the Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services suspended Novus, Harris simply transferred patients from Novus to a new company, which used Novus staff and transferred hospice reimbursements back to Novus, the DOJ adds.

The DOJ release doesn't mention some of the shocking charges first named in the search warrant affidavit and the original indictment - namely, that Harris had staff intentionally overdose patients to hasten their death for financial gain under the cap; and that he texted with a nurse about that practice (see Hospice Insider, Vol. 10, No. 4).

Harris is scheduled for sentencing on Aug. 3 and could face up to 14 years in prison, Justice says. Ten codefendants have already pleaded guilty while four more, including two referring physicians, are slated for trial this month.