

Eli's Hospice Insider

Fraud & Abuse: Second Defendant Pleads Guilty In Notorious Novus Case

Plus: Are you ready for your execs' salaries to be published in a newspaper exposé?

Two hospice fraud and abuse cases have widely publicized developments that may make hospices' missions harder.

Case #1: Trustbridge, the West Palm Beach, Florida-based parent company of **Hospice of Palm Beach County** and **Hospice By The Sea**, has settled fraudulent billing charges from the government for nearly \$1 million, reports The Palm Beach Post. The settlement comes after the company's 37 percent pay increase to Trustbridge CEO **David Fielding** in 2016, putting his pay at \$954,071. Fielding also set the pay of at least seven other officers at more than \$300,000 each in the latest year available, with three over \$400,000, the newspaper says.

A social worker who says she was fired for complaining about a lack of patient care resources told the newspaper she didn't get raises for years. And "Fielding's 37 percent raise is bigger than his 30 percent pay boost the same year a mother of three said the organization fired her because she could work only 30 hours a week while fighting breast cancer, the Post reported in 2014." The hospice's retired founder called the firing "unconscionable."

The Post pointed out that Fielding's compensation is now nearly triple the pay of Palm Beach County's school superintendent in the nation's 11th largest school district, and almost four times that of the head of the local **United Way**.

Case #2: Another of the 16 people indicted in the case involving **Novus Health Services** in Frisco, Texas, has entered a guilty plea to Medicare fraud charges. Former hospice nursing supervisor **Jessica Love**, who is expected to testify against Novus owner **Brad Harris** and others, said that Harris gave instructions to nurses "to intentionally overmedicate beneficiaries with medications such as hydromorphone and morphine with the intent to hasten their deaths," reports the Associated Press. "Harris ordered these increases in medication because he wanted the beneficiaries to die."

Love also admitted to sending texts to a nurse to turn off a patient's oxygen, increase Ativan and morphine and roll the patient onto their left side, saying that it "works like a charm."

Director of operations **Melanie Murphey** pleaded guilty to charges in the case recently (see Eli's Hospice Insider, Vol. 11, No. 7). The federal trial for the other defendants is scheduled for January, but Love's sentencing date hasn't been set, AP says.