

Eli's Hospice Insider

Hospice News: Government Joins Whistleblower Lawsuit

Ignoring VP's complaints brings the feds' wrath down on hospice.

Add one more whistleblower action to the list of lawsuits the feds have joined. U.S. District Judge **Anne C. Conway** has cleared the way for a **Department of Justice** request to intervene in a suit against Altamonte Springs, Fla.-based **Hospice of the Comforter**, reports the Orlando Sentinel.

Last October, former Hospice of the Comforter VP of finance **Douglas Stone** filed a qui tam suit claiming he was fired after repeatedly urging hospice founder and CEO **Robert Wilson** and several board members to reimburse Medicare for billing for patients kept on service too long.

Among the allegations in Stone's suit are that the hospice discharged a large number of long-stay patients after Medicare initiated medical review; the hospice served some patients as long as five years; Wilson had an incentive to keep patients on service as long as possible because more than half his pay came from bonuses based on the number of billable patients each day, with his annual bonuses reaching nearly \$200,000; and Wilson later insisted some patients discharged as not terminally ill be readmitted and their care billed to Medicare, reports the Sentinel.

In May, nine months after Stone filed his suit, the hospice signed a management agreement with **Adventist Health System**. The hospice has cooperated with investigators and has "endeavored over the last few years to become fully compliant with Medicare guidelines," **L.T. Lafferty**, an attorney representing the hospice, told the newspaper.