

Eli's Hospice Insider

Hospice News: Hospice Director Of Operations Turns Star Witness In Salacious Texas Case

Mainstream news stories outlining Medicare hospice fraud and abuse are enough to undermine confidence in hospice providers and the services they offer. But a chilling case alleging that a hospice intentionally overdosed patients to hasten death is enough to scare patients and referral sources away in droves.

Last month, one of the 16 people indicted in the case involving **Novus Health Services** in Frisco, Texas, admitted to Medicare fraud, reports The Dallas Morning News. Director of operations **Melanie Murphey** has pleaded guilty to health care fraud and is expected to testify against the 15 others defendants, including Novus owner **Brad Harris** and his wife, **Amy**, the newspaper says. The other defendants have pleaded not guilty.

In April 2016, an **FBI** affidavit to support a search warrant revealed allegations that Brad Harris allegedly directed nurses to give hospice patients overdoses of drugs such as morphine to speed up their deaths and maximize profits under the aggregate cap (see Eli's Hospice Insider, Vol. 10, No. 4). He allegedly sent text messages like, "You need to make this patient go bye-bye."

The indictment made in February 2017 included a laundry list of misdeeds including paying kickbacks for patient referrals, billing for ineligible patients, and upcoding to Continuous Home Care service levels. Five of the 16 defendants are physicians who served as Novus medical directors.

While the indictment didn't contain the overdosing allegations, it did include an example of texts that support the charge.

Watch for more headline-generating activity in this case as it moves forward with Murphey as a witness.