

Eli's Hospice Insider

Hospice News: VITAS Settles Whistleblower Lawsuit For \$200K

For-profit chain denies wrongdoing.

When one of your referral sources gets locked up for 45 years for Medicare fraud, you may be in trouble too.

That was the case with 15-state chain **VITAS Healthcare**, which is owned by publicly traded **Chemed Corp.** Vitas Health Corp. Midwest and related entities have agreed to pay \$200,000 to resolve allegations that they violated the False Claims Act and the Anti-Kickback Statute by paying Dr. **Farid Fata** for patient referrals, the **Department of Justice** says in a release.

Rita Dubois, former Director of Market Development for VITAS in Michigan, alleged in a qui tam filing that from mid-2012 through early 2014, Vitas contributed \$15,750 to Fata's **Swan For Life Cancer Foundation**, in return for 23 patient referrals, according to the DOJ.

Fata is serving the sentence for fraud including intentionally misdiagnosing and mistreating hundreds of cancer patients for money, including giving healthy people chemotherapy, among other charges, notes the Detroit Free Press.

In a release, VITAS denies wrongdoing in the case, noting that the funds went to "actual charitable events," the Free Press reports. The Miami-based company, which calls itself "the largest hospice provider in the U.S." on its Website, says it settled the case to avoid legal expenses.

Dubois will receive \$36,000, the DOJ says. The whistleblower in the case against Fata received \$1.3 million, according to the newspaper.