



Florida doctor sentenced to 20 years in prison for substance abuse treatment fraud scheme

January 13, 2023

PALM BEACH COUNTY, Fla. – A Florida doctor was sentenced Monday to 20 years in prison for engaging in a massive multi-year scheme to bill health care benefit programs for fraudulent tests and treatments for vulnerable patients seeking treatment for drug and/or alcohol addiction, according to a press release from the U.S. Department of Justice.

According to court documents, Michael J. Ligotti, D.O., 48, of Delray Beach, served as Medical Director or Authorizing Physician for over 50 sober homes, substance abuse treatment facilities, and clinical testing laboratories in the Palm Beach County area, often signing standing orders for expensive, medically unnecessary urine drug tests for patients at various addiction treatment facilities. These facilities routinely sent patients' urine specimens to clinical testing laboratories, which then billed health care benefit programs for unnecessary urine drug tests, often thousands of dollars for a single test.

In exchange for Ligotti's authorization of these urine drug tests, the treatment centers required their patients to regularly visit Ligotti's clinic, Whole Health LLC, for additional treatment and testing, or allowed Ligotti's staff to come to their facilities to conduct tests and treatment there. This allowed Ligotti to profit by billing patients' private health insurance plans for duplicative, medically unnecessary, and expensive urine drug tests, blood tests, and other addiction treatments.

As a result of this conduct, which took place from 2011 to 2020, health care benefit programs were billed over \$746 million and paid approximately \$127 million for fraudulent urine drug tests and addiction treatments. During the course of the scheme, Amtrak's health care plan was billed approximately \$2.18 million and paid out more than \$535,000.

"The results in this case reinforce our commitment and determination to pursue those who would defraud Amtrak's health care programs and target vulnerable populations," said Special Agent in Charge Mike Waters of the Amtrak Office of Inspector General's Eastern Field Office. "Our agents will continue to work closely with the task force and partner agencies to hold perpetrators accountable and protect Amtrak's resources, its employees, and their dependents."

Ligotti was also ordered to surrender his medical license on Monday, according to the Department of Justice press release.

In addition to the Amtrak Office of Inspector General, the case was investigated by the FBI Miami Division Palm Beach Resident Agency; Drug Enforcement Agency West Palm Beach Diversion Group; IRS Criminal Investigation Miami Field Office; Department of Labor ERISA; Florida Department of Financial Services, Division of Investigative and Forensic Services; and Palm Beach County Office of the State Attorney. Senior Litigation Counsel James V. Hayes and Trial Attorney Ligia M. Markman of the Criminal Division's Fraud Section and Assistant U.S. Attorney Alexandra Chase, Chief, Transnational, Trafficking & Cyber Crimes Unit for the Southern District of Florida prosecuted the case.

The National Rapid Response Strike Force, Los Angeles Strike Force, and Miami Strike Force of the Criminal Division, Fraud Section, and the U.S. Attorneys' Offices for the Southern District of Florida and Central District of California lead the Department of Justice's Sober Homes Initiative, which was initiated in September 2020 to prosecute defendants who exploit vulnerable patients seeking treatment for drug and/or alcohol addiction. Since its inception, the Sober Homes Initiative has resulted in charges and guilty pleas or convictions involving 28 criminal defendants in two judicial districts in connection with over \$1 billion in alleged false billings for fraudulent tests and treatments for vulnerable patients seeking treatment for drug and/or alcohol addiction.

Reports of fraud, waste, or abuse; criminal or unethical acts affecting Amtrak's property or operations; or mismanagement in Amtrak programs or operations can be made 24 hours a day via the Amtrak OIG Hotline at 1-800-468-5469 or online at <https://direc.to/hPAu>.

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