

PRESS RELEASE

Pharmacy Owners and Doctor Convicted for \$145M Health Care Fraud, Money Laundering, and Tax Evasion Scheme

Friday, November 17, 2023

For Immediate Release

Office of Public Affairs

A federal jury convicted three Texas men yesterday for a \$145 million scheme to defraud the Department of Labor through the submission of fraudulent claims for prescription compound creams.

According to court documents and evidence presented at trial, Dehshid "David" Nourian, 59, of Plano; and Christopher Rydberg, 47, of Fort Worth, and others conspired to pay Dr. Michael Taba, 59, of McKinney, and other doctors to prescribe medically unnecessary compound creams to injured federal workers. Nourian and Rydberg owned and/or operated three pharmacies located in Fort Worth and Arlington. They paid Taba for referring expensive compound medications to be filled by those pharmacies. In less than three years, between May 2014 and March 2017, the pharmacies billed the Department of Labor Office of Workers' Compensation Programs (DOL-OWCP) and Blue Cross Blue Shield more than \$145 million and were paid more than \$90 million for unnecessary prescriptions referred by Taba and other providers in exchange for bribes and kickbacks. Nourian, Rydberg, and others then attempted to conceal their ill-gotten gains by laundering the money through purported holding companies and attempted to evade paying federal income taxes on the illicit proceeds.

Nourian, Rydberg, and Taba were convicted of one count of conspiracy to commit health care fraud; and eight (Nourian) and three (Taba) counts of health care fraud, respectively, each count carrying a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison. Nourian and Rydberg were also convicted of one count of conspiracy to launder money and five and six counts of money laundering, respectively, each count carrying a maximum penalty of

20 years in prison, and one count of conspiracy to defraud the United States, which carries a maximum penalty of five years in prison.

All of the defendants are scheduled to be sentenced at a later date. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

Acting Assistant Attorney General Nicole M. Argentieri of the Justice Department's Criminal Division; Special Agent in Charge Jonathan Ulrich of the U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (USPS-OIG), Southern Area Field Office; Acting Special Agent in Charge Casey Howard of the Department of Labor Office of the Inspector General (DOL-OIG), Dallas Regional Office; Special Agent in Charge Kris Raper of the Department of Veterans Affairs Office of the Inspector General (VA-OIG), South Central Field Office; and Special Agent in Charge Ramsey Covington of the IRS Criminal Investigation (IRS-CI) Houston Field Office made the announcement.

The USPS-OIG, DOL-OIG, VA-OIG, and IRS-CI investigated the case.

Trial Attorneys Alexander Thor Pogozelski, Ethan Womble, and Edward Emokpae of the Criminal Division's Fraud Section are prosecuting the case, with significant assistance from Acting Assistant Chief Catherine Wagner.

The Fraud Section leads the Criminal Division's efforts to combat health care fraud through the Health Care Fraud Strike Force Program. Since March 2007, this program, currently comprised of nine strike forces operating in 27 federal districts, has charged more than 5,400 defendants who collectively have billed federal health care programs and private insurers more than \$27 billion. In addition, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, working in conjunction with the Office of the Inspector General for the Department of Health and Human Services, are taking steps to hold providers accountable for their involvement in health care fraud schemes. More information can be found at www.justice.gov/criminal-fraud/health-care-fraud-unit.

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