

Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Eastern District of Pennsylvania

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Fourteen Individuals Charged for Operating “Pill Mills” and Illegally Prescribing Drugs to Hundreds of Patients in Multiple Locations in the Philadelphia Area

PHILADELPHIA, PA – United States Attorney William M. McSwain announced two indictments charging 14 people with a multitude of crimes, including conspiracy to dispense and distribute controlled substances outside the course of professional practice and without a legitimate medical purpose; distribution of oxycodone; health care fraud; and maintaining a drug-involved premises. These charges are the result of coordinated law enforcement effort across multiple federal, state, and local agencies. U.S. Attorney McSwain announced these charges as part of a press conference held today to highlight the Eastern District of Pennsylvania's recent efforts to combat the opioid crisis in the District.

Criminal Indictment No. 18-CR-101: Advanced Urgent Care (AUC). This superseding indictment charges 13 defendants with crimes in connection with their employment at AUC, a medical business with office locations at 5058 City Avenue in Philadelphia, PA; 9432 East Roosevelt Boulevard in Philadelphia, PA; 721 Bethlehem Pike in Montgomeryville, PA; and 126 Easton Road in Willow Grove, PA.

The 13 defendants charged in this indictment are Dr. Mehdi Nikparvar-Fard, 49, of Penn Valley, PA; Dr. Vincent Thompson, 70, of Elkins Park, PA; Dr. Loretta Brown, 65, of Landsowne, PA; Dr. Avrom Brown, 70, of Elkins Park, PA; Dr. Frederick Reichle, 83, of Warrington, PA; Dr. Marcus Rey Williams, 70, of Coatesville, PA; Dr. William Demedio, 58, of Springfield, PA; Dr. Neil Cutler, 77, of Warminster, PA; Physician's Assistant Mitchell White, 33, of Philadelphia, PA; Physician's Assistant Jason Dillinger, 40, of West Chester, PA; Physician's Assistant Debra Cortez, 56, of Bristol, PA; Physician's Assistant Samantha Hollis, 42, of Wilmington, DE, and Office Manager Joanne Rivera, 35, of Pennsauken, NJ. Each defendant is charged with maintaining a drug-involved premises, and five defendants (Nikparvar-Fard, Rivera, Dillinger, Thompson, and White) are charged with conspiring to unlawfully distribute controlled substances.

AUC was owned and operated by Dr. Mehdi Nikparvar-Fard. The indictment alleges that, in exchange for an \$80 to \$140 office fee, members of the public were offered “pain management” by AUC doctors and physician's assistants. Pain management typically involved obtaining a prescription for opioid painkillers. The superseding indictment further alleges that AUC medical providers unlawfully prescribed controlled substances, such as opioid painkillers, on a daily basis from January of 2014 through August of 2017 and routinely ignored warning signs that patients were abusing and/or selling their prescription painkillers. The warning signs included urine drug screens that were positive for illicit drugs like heroin, cocaine, and methamphetamine, urine drug screens that were positive for Suboxone (a drug used to treat opiate addiction), and urine drug screen that were negative for all drugs, suggesting the patients may have been selling their prescription pills. In the face of these test results, AUC medical providers nonetheless prescribed enormous quantities of opioid painkillers. According to the indictment, at least 3,678 illegal prescriptions were issued by AUC's doctors and physician's assistants.

Criminal Indictment No. 18-CR-591: Drs. Murray Soss and Frederick Reichle. This indictment charges Dr. Murray Soss, 78, of Philadelphia, PA, and Dr. Frederick Reichle, [1] 83, of Warrington, PA, with conspiracy to distribute and dispense oxycodone, outside the usual course of practice and not for a legitimate medical purpose. Dr. Soss is also charged with seven counts of distributing oxycodone and seven counts of health care fraud.

As alleged in the indictment, Soss hired Reichle to write oxycodone prescriptions for Soss's pain management patients after Soss's Pennsylvania medical license was suspended in April 2017. Soss and Reichle charged the patients a fee to obtain oxycodone prescriptions, written by Reichle, that were not medically necessary. At times, Soss allegedly collected \$2,500 in exchange for accepting a new patient for the sole purpose of that patient obtaining Schedule II narcotics. The indictment further states that Reichle provided oxycodone prescriptions to one of Soss's patients without this patient being present, and claims Soss was engaged in a sexual relationship with this same patient. It further states that Soss obtained oxycodone prescriptions in Soss's name and then distributed the prescriptions to this patient in exchange for sexual favors.

If convicted, these 14 defendants face a range of penalties, including substantial prison time and fines, depending on each defendant's degree of involvement in the alleged crimes.

"Our country is in the midst of a deadly drug epidemic, and our District is, in many ways, ground zero in combatting this crisis," said U.S. Attorney McSwain. "As alleged in these indictments, thousands of illegally prescribed pills flooded our streets because of the conduct of these defendants. My Office will continue to do its part to enforce our nation's drug laws and hold physicians, physician's assistants, and their agents accountable. As these indictments show, medical professionals who violate their oaths and exploit their patients' addictions to make an easy buck will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law."

"We're seeing it over and over again: medical professionals, deciding to cash in on our area's opioid crisis," said Michael T. Harpster, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI's Philadelphia Division. "It seems 'first, do no harm' is a principle fast forgotten when money starts changing hands. These doctors are just doling out piles of pills to anyone willing to pay for them. It's despicable, it's criminal, and the FBI and our law enforcement partners will never stop working to put pill mills, and the people who run them, out of business."

"The defendants arrested in this case are accused of setting up and operating a scheme in which the defendants sold opioid prescriptions to individuals without any legitimate medical need or purpose in exchange for cash. The defendants issued 3,678 prescriptions which amount to hundreds of thousands of pills being used by addicted individuals," said Jonathan A. Wilson, Special Agent in Charge of the Drug Enforcement Administration's (DEA) Philadelphia Field Division. "When the DEA determines that a doctor is prescribing controlled substance medications without a legitimate medical purpose, the DEA will refer the investigation to the US Attorney's Office for prosecution to the fullest extent of the law."

"Healthcare providers who ignore their Hippocratic oaths and put illegal prescription drugs on our streets are nothing more than drug dealers in white lab coats," said Maureen R. Dixon, Special Agent in Charge of the Philadelphia Regional Office of the Inspector General for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS-OIG). "Medical providers who disregard the law and put greed in front of helping patients can expect criminal repercussions."

"An important mission of the Office of Inspector General is to investigate allegations of health care fraud related to the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) Office of Workers' Compensation Programs (OWCP). We will continue to work with our law enforcement partners and OWCP to protect the

integrity of DOL's benefit programs," stated Richard Deer, Special Agent in Charge, Philadelphia Region, U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General.

The AUC case was investigated by the following agencies: Drug Enforcement Administration; the Federal Bureau of Investigation; Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General; the Department of Labor, Office of the Inspector General; and the Office of Personnel Management. These agencies were assisted in their investigation by the Pennsylvania Department of State; Pennsylvania Office of Attorney General; Abington Police Department; Easttown Township Police Department; and Philadelphia Police Department. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Jason P. Bologna and Seth Schlessinger.

The Soss/Reichle case was investigated by Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General and Federal Bureau of Investigation, with assistance from Pennsylvania Office of Attorney General and the Philadelphia Police Department. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Karen Marston.

[1] Dr. Reichle also is a named co-defendant in the AUC superseding indictment, though the charges alleged in the AUC case arise from conduct that is separate from that alleged in Soss/Reichle case.