

**PRESS RELEASE**

# **Pain Doctors Sentenced to 6 ½ Years In \$45 Million Healthcare Fraud**

Thursday, September 26, 2024

**For Immediate Release**

U.S. Attorney's Office, Northern District of Texas

Two pain management doctors who pantomimed injections on patients were sentenced today to six and a half years apiece for healthcare fraud, announced U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Texas Leigha Simonton.

Drs. Desi Barroga, 51, and Deno Barroga, 51, were indicted in November 2023 and pleaded guilty in May 2024 to one count each of conspiracy to commit healthcare fraud. They were sentenced Thursday by U.S. District Judge Brantley Starr, who ordered them jointly and severally liable for \$9,016,883.10 in restitution. Under the terms of their plea agreement, both men were also required to forfeit their medical licenses.

"These doctors exploited drug users' vulnerabilities, requiring them to submit to monthly visits in exchange for controlled substance prescriptions, then billing their insurance providers for services the patients did not need nor receive. In a bizarre attempt to cover up their crimes, the defendants feigned giving injections without actually piercing the patients' skin," said U.S. Attorney Leigha Simonton. "Not only did they defraud their patients' insurers, they facilitated their patients' addictions. Their actions are antithetical to the practice of medicine, and the U.S. Attorney's Office is proud to hold them accountable for their crimes."

"Deno and Desi Barroga conspired to fraudulently bill private insurance companies, which included Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 covered plans, tens of millions of dollars for services not rendered. Among other things, both doctors falsely represented to insurance companies that patients received over eighty injections during the office visits, when, in fact, the patients received few or no injections at all. This sentencing reflects the Office of Inspector General's commitment to working with the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) Employee Benefits Security Administration and our law enforcement partners to investigate and bring to justice those who engage in fraud against employee benefit programs," said Casey J. Howard, Special Agent in Charge, Central Region, U.S. Department of Labor - Office of Inspector General.

According to court documents, the twin brothers admitted that they conspired to defraud Blue Cross Blue Shield, Cigna, and United Healthcare by submitting claims for corticosteroid injections that were never administered.

As part of the conspiracy, the Barrogas required patients to submit to monthly office visits. This allowed patients to continue receiving highly addictive Schedule II controlled substances – including hydrocodone, oxycodone, and morphine – while allowing the defendants to bill patients’ insurance companies for expensive services they never provided.

The Barrogas reported to insurance that they performed as many as 80 corticosteroid injections per patient per visit. In reality, the majority of these injections were never administered. In many instances, the doctor simply placed a needle on the patient’s body without actually piercing the skin to mimic giving an injection.

The defendants created fake medical records, which were often cut and pasted, or cloned, from patient to patient with little to no variation. They also instructed patients to include false statements pertaining to the injections and other treatments in the record.

In plea papers, the brothers admitted that they billed insurers at least \$45 million and were paid at least \$9 million as part of the scheme.

The U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Inspector General, the U.S Department of Labor’s Employee Benefits Security Administration, U.S Office of Personnel Management’s Office of the Inspector General, the Drug Enforcement Administration’s Dallas Field Division Diversion Group, and the Texas Department of Insurance – Fraud Unit – Austin and Fort Worth Field Offices conducted the investigation. Assistant U.S. Attorney Renee Hunter is prosecuting the case. Assistant U.S. Attorney Dimitri Rocha assisted with forfeiture.

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### **Topic**

**HEALTH CARE FRAUD**

**Component**

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