

NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Pharmacy Technician Pleads Guilty to Illegal Distribution of Oxycodone

(More)

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TRENTON – A pharmacy technician formerly employed at Community Medical Center in Toms River pleaded guilty today to federal Indictment that charges him with conspiring to illegally distribute oxycodone, Acting U.S. Attorney Ralph J. Marra, Jr., announced.

George Palias, 28, of Toms River, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Mary L. Cooper to one count of conspiracy to distribute and possess with intent to distribute oxycodone. Judge Cooper continued the defendant's release on a \$50,000 bond pending sentencing, which is scheduled for June 18.

Palias initially was arrested on a criminal Complaint by Special Agents with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration on June 9, 2008.

At his plea hearing, Palias admitted that between December 2007 and March 2008, while working as a pharmacy technician at the Community Medical Center ("CMC"), he worked with a fellow pharmacy technician named Alicia Benko. Palias admitted that on at least three occasions, he provided oxycodone to Benko, 22, of Toms River, with the intention that she would provide the oxycodone to another individual in return for a cash payment. Palias admitted that Benko gave him a portion of the cash payments from each of the three transactions.

Benko was initially arrested on a criminal Complaint on April 8, 2008, and subsequently pleaded guilty before Judge Cooper on Sept. 26, 2008. Benko pleaded guilty to a one-count Information charging her with distribution and possession with intent to distribute oxycodone.

At her plea hearing, Benko admitted that on several occasions she sold a quantity of oxycodone to another individual, who turned out to be an undercover law enforcement officer. Benko stated that she received oxycodone from Palias, with the intention of providing the Schedule II controlled substance to another individual. Benko admitted that on three occasions during December 2007 and January 2008, after receiving oxycodone from Palias, she provided the oxycodone to the undercover law enforcement officer in exchange for a sum of money and then gave a portion of the proceeds to Palias.

On Jan 8, 2009, Judge Cooper sentenced Benko to 12 months in federal prison and also ordered her to serve three years of supervised release upon the completion of her prison term.

The charge to which Palias pleaded guilty, conspiracy to distribute and possess with intent to distribute oxycodone, carries a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison and a fine of \$1 million.

In determining an actual sentence, Judge Cooper will consult the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges that take into account the severity and characteristics of the offense, the defendant's criminal history, if any, and other factors. The judge, however, is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence.

Parole has been abolished in the federal system. Defendants who are given custodial terms must serve nearly all that time.

Marra credited Special Agents with the DEA, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Gerard P. McAleer, in Newark, with the investigation of the case.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Peter N. Katz, of the U.S. Attorney's Criminal Division in Trenton.

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Defense Attorney: John Flynn, Esq. Manasquan