

NEWS RELEASE



OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

San Diego, California

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For Immediate Release

Medical Supply Company Owner Sentenced to Prison For Bilking Medicare Trust Fund

Ordered to Pay More Than \$320,000 in Restitution

NEWS RELEASE SUMMARY - October 15, 2012

United States Attorney Laura E. Duffy announced that the owner of a medical supply store previously located in El Cajon, California, was sentenced to just over a year in custody for her participation in a conspiracy to defraud the Medicare trust fund out of more than \$320,000.

According to court documents, Oddeth Afara was the owner and operator of Trinity Heart Medical Supply, a company that sold “durable medical equipment,” such as power wheelchairs and hospital beds. Afara pleaded guilty in June 2012 to conspiring to commit health care fraud, admitting that she tricked Medicare into paying her company more than \$320,000 based upon false and fraudulent claims for power wheelchairs. According to admissions in her plea

agreement, Afara purchased scores of bogus prescriptions for power wheelchairs, knowing that the Medicare beneficiaries who were to receive the power wheelchairs did not need the equipment and could walk without any assistance. As defendant admitted again at today's court hearing, the prescriptions themselves were completely fraudulent; indeed, most were littered with forged physicians' signatures, and provided false patient diagnoses that were used to justify the unnecessary power wheelchairs. Afara used these fraudulent prescriptions to submit 82 false claims to Medicare for beneficiaries who did not need the power wheelchairs. The scheme lasted for more than a year, from April 2008 to June 2009, and was not uncovered by law enforcement until much later.

As the Government explained during the sentencing hearing, the Medicare system is fundamentally based on trust, with Medicare generally paying for equipment such as wheelchairs based on the face-value of the claims. As observed by U.S. District Court Judge Thomas J. Whelan at today's hearing, Afara's scheme hurt *all* Medicare beneficiaries by inflating the overall cost of health care and siphoning money from the Medicare trust fund that could have been used to fund legitimate medical services.

For her part in the health care fraud conspiracy, Judge Whelan sentenced Afara to twelve months and one day in custody, followed by three years of supervised release. Judge Whelan also ordered Afara to pay full restitution in the amount of \$320,028.17, in order to repair the damage she had inflicted upon the Medicare trust fund.

DEFENDANT **CRIMINAL CASE NO. 12cr2442-W**

Oddeth Afara

SUMMARY OF CHARGES

One Count - Conspiracy to Commit Health Care Fraud -Title 18, United States Code, Section 1349.

INVESTIGATING AGENCIES

Federal Bureau of Investigation
Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General