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For Immediate Release
June 4, 2009

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LOUISIANA CARDIOLOGIST SENTENCED IN FEDERAL COURT FOR PERFORMING UNNECESSARY MEDICAL PROCEDURES

*Mehmood M. Patel, M.D. receives maximum sentence of 10 years in federal prison,
ordered to pay \$387,511.56 in restitution, and a fine of \$175,000.00*

LAFAYETTE, LOUISIANA . . . United States Attorney Donald W. Washington, along with Health & Human Services Office of Inspector General Special Agent in Charge, Mike Fields, and FBI, New Orleans Division, Special Agent in Charge, David Welker, announced today that DR. MEHMOOD M. PATEL, age 64, of Lafayette, was sentenced in United States District Court for healthcare fraud. U.S. District Judge Tucker L. Melancon sentenced PATEL to spend 10 years in federal prison and a term of three years supervised release following confinement. The court also ordered the defendant to pay \$387,511.56 in restitution and a \$175,000.00 fine. PATEL'S 10-year sentence is the maximum sentence allowed by the applicable statute.

PATEL was indicted in February 2006 stemming from a complaint made to the Department of Health & Human Services that the defendant was placing coronary stents in people who did not need them. A search warrant was executed on Patel's office in November 2003, at which time patient files were seized.

Beginning on or about September 2003, Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital (OLOL) in Lafayette, LA conducted an internal investigation leading to the suspension of PATEL'S privileges at OLOL. A similar process was undertaken by Lafayette General Medical Center (LGMC) in late 2003 and early 2004 which also led to PATEL being suspended from practicing at LGMC. After the hospitals suspended the defendant's privileges, the Louisiana State Medical Board restricted PATEL'S license to practice interventional cardiology, leaving him the ability to practice internal medicine pending the results of the criminal trial.

Testimony at trial revealed that MEHMOOD M. PATEL, M.D., who has been practicing interventional cardiology in Lafayette, Louisiana and surrounding areas for more than 25 years, was falsifying patient symptoms in medical records, falsifying findings on medical tests, and performing unnecessary coronary procedures such as deploying angioplasty balloons and stents. Testimony from experts in cardiology specialties revealed that the defendant deployed stents, balloons, and radiation in coronary arteries that had little or insignificant disease. Testifying medical experts included doctors from Emory University in Atlanta, GA, the University of Pennsylvania Medical School in Philadelphia, PA, Mt. Sinai Hospital in New York City, and the University of California at Los Angeles, CA, as well as cardiologists practicing in Louisiana. Each expert testified about only a small number of the thousands of procedures performed annually for many years by PATEL. The indictment in this case contained 91 counts involving only 75 patients chosen by the government with the help of these experts.

Additionally, the jury heard testimony from dozens of other government witnesses including medical technicians, nurses, and patients who painted the defendant as one who lacked concern for patient care and safety. Many of the nurses and technicians indicated their concerns and made complaints to their supervisors after witnessing unnecessary angioplasty procedures performed by the defendant doctor.

Testimony also revealed that PATEL was performing unnecessary medical procedures and billing both Medicare and private insurance companies, which added up to millions of dollars paid to PATEL and the hospitals where many of the procedures were performed. During the years 1999-2003, PATEL was the number one biller in cardiology services for the State of Louisiana. During the approximately three-year period covered by the indictment, PATEL billed Medicare and private insurance companies more than \$3 million, of which he received \$541,745.00 from this scheme. The indicted charges included less than \$90,000.00 of the amount received by the defendant.

PATEL performed procedures at both Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital and Lafayette General Medical Center, as well as a leased mobile catheterization lab located outside his practice, Acadiana Cardiology, before he opened his own catheterization lab in mid-2002 on the second floor of his office on St. Julien Street in Lafayette, Louisiana.

United States Attorney Donald W. Washington stated: "Healthcare professionals who are tempted to satisfy their own ambitions at the risk of putting their patients in danger by performing unnecessary procedures is a criminal violation of federal law. I can only hope that this prosecution and 10-year sentence will have a significant impact on other healthcare professionals to remind them of their obligations to patient care and safety. Healthcare fraud will not go unheeded - physicians will be held accountable, and the United States Attorney's Office for the Western District of Louisiana will continue to vigorously pursue prosecution to the fullest extent of the law for all of those who engage in such conduct."

Special Agent in Charge for Health & Human Services Office of Inspector General, Mike Fields, stated: "Today's sentencing marks the end of only a single battle in the ongoing war against those who purposely attack the financial integrity of the Medicare program. HHS-OIG, along with our state and federal law enforcement partners, is committed to protecting the Medicare program and its beneficiaries."

Special Agent in Charge of the FBI's New Orleans Division, David Welker, stated: "The nature of this crime wherein a medical professional performing medically unnecessary procedures is atrocious putting patients at significant risk. Patients or their caregiver need to become personally engaged in their own medical care, question healthcare providers and ask for clarification. The FBI takes Healthcare Fraud seriously, and this sentence should send a powerful message to other healthcare providers who abuse their oath to increase their wealth."

Sentencing in federal court is determined by the discretion of federal judges and the governing statute. United States Sentencing Guidelines established by the United States Congress and the United States Sentencing Commission are only used as guidelines by the judge in determining the appropriate sentence. Parole has been abolished in the federal system.

This case was investigated by Special Agent Barbara Alleman of Health & Human Services and Special Agents Troy Chenevert and Greg Harbourt of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The case was prosecuted by United States Attorney Donald W. Washington and Assistant United States Attorney Kelly Uebinger.

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