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## HOUSTON MAN CONVICTED OF HEALTH CARE FRAUD

*Over \$600,000 Stolen from Medicare Based on False Claims*

**Shreveport, La:** Godspower Joseph Essang, 35, of Houston, Texas, pled guilty today to one count of health care fraud arising out of his scheme to defraud the Medicare Program, United States Attorney Stephanie A. Finley announced. Judge S. Maurice Hicks scheduled Essang's sentencing for January 24, 2013. Essang faces a maximum term of imprisonment of not more than 10 years, a fine of not more than \$250,000, or both, and a term of supervised release of at least one year but not more than three years.

During the guilty plea, Essang admitted that he operated Shalom Equipment, a durable medical equipment company, located on Woodward Avenue in Shreveport, Louisiana. Shalom engaged in the business of providing what were referred to as "ortho kits" which were basically braces for various parts of the body. Essang admitted operating his company out of Shreveport because Medicare was focusing on false claims by durable medical equipment providers out of Houston. By operating out of Shreveport, the claims he submitted received less scrutiny.

Essang admitted paying individuals for identifying information of Medicare beneficiaries and physicians. He then used this identifying information to file false claims with Medicare for providing "ortho kits" to Medicare beneficiaries who did not need, were not prescribed and/or did not receive the items. Essang admitted that between August 12, 2007, and October 21, 2008, he filed approximately 736 claims, billing Medicare for \$1,223,255. Medicare actually paid out \$613,096 on the claims.

United States Attorney Stephanie A. Finley stated, "Mr. Essang's scheme was designed to defraud a program whose sole purpose is providing medical services to the elderly and the disabled. His actions defrauded the program and, ultimately, the U.S.

taxpayers. This office will continue to vigorously pursue charges against those who steal from such programs.”

“Durable medical equipment fraud is a major problem that costs taxpayers billions in lost and wasted dollars. Today’s guilty plea is the culmination of a concerted and joint effort by our Inspector General’s Office, the U.S. Attorney’s Office and the Federal Bureau of Investigation to quickly bring to justice those who prey on our elderly for financial gain,” said William W. Root, Assistant Special Agent in Charge, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Inspector General. The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States C. Mignonne Griffing.

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