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United States Attorney's Office
District of Alaska

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Eagle River Nurse Practitioner Guilty on All Counts

Defendant prescribed ~4.5 million opioids with little to no medical justification causing addiction, suffering and deaths across Alaska.

ANCHORAGE – A federal jury convicted an Eagle River nurse practitioner on 10 felony counts, including five counts of distribution of a controlled substance resulting in death, four counts of distribution and dispensing of a controlled substance and one count of maintaining a drug involved premises. The conviction follows a four-week trial before U.S. District Judge Joshua M. Kindred.

According to court documents and evidence presented at trial, Jessica Joyce Spayd, 51, operated Eagle River Pain and Wellness where she prescribed nearly 4.5 million opioids between January 2014 and October 2019 causing addiction, suffering and death. She did so with little to no medical justification or treatment plan; minimal, if any, tests or physical examinations; and little if any considerations of non-opioid treatment.

Spayd's opioid prescriptions were excessive and drastically exceeded medical norms, routinely five to 15 times higher than the maximum safe daily dosage recommended by state and federal health guidelines and combined with other narcotics known to exacerbate the risk of addiction and overdose death.

When she was out of the office, Spayd routinely pre-signed and pre-dated prescriptions and instructed non-medical staff to distribute the prescriptions to patients for a cash fee. And, in addition to her "patients," she illegally prescribed nearly 5,000 opioid pills to her opioid-addicted, live-in ex-boyfriend by writing the names of other individuals on those prescriptions. She also created false appointment records for those other individuals, who the evidence showed were outside of Alaska or out of the United States when those appointments purportedly occurred.

For years, dozens of pharmacists throughout Alaska told the defendant to stop the dangerous prescribing and to lower the dosages for her patients. Emergency room doctors who treated her patients for opioid overdoses told her to stop. Insurance companies sent thousands of letters telling her to stop. Concerned family members of her patients pleaded with her to stop. Her prescribing was so far outside the normal course of medical practice that multiple major pharmacy chains like Walmart and Safeway, and the Chief of Pharmacy at Joint Base Elmendorf, enacted unprecedented policies refusing to fill her narcotic prescriptions.

Between May and July 2019, Spayd prescribed nearly 200 opioid pills in just three appointments to an undercover DEA agent posing as an opioid addict with no current pain symptoms in exchange for large cash payments. She specifically acknowledged in a recorded conversation with the undercover agent that what she was doing was a felony and she could go to jail.

U.S. Attorney S. Lane Tucker of the District of Alaska made the announcement.

Spayd was initially charged by indictment in October 2019 and then with a superseding indictment in January 2021 by the United States Attorney's Office, District of Alaska.

These offenses carry mandatory minimum of 20 years to life in federal prison for the most serious charges. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors. There is no parole in the federal system.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Ryan Tansey and Michael Heyman are prosecuting the case.

The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) conducted the investigation leading to the charges in this case, with invaluable assistance from members of the North Slope Borough Police Department, the Alaska Health Care Fraud Task Force, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services-Office of the Inspector General, Internal Revenue Service (IRS), U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Office of Law Enforcement and Security, Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Alaska State Parks Rangers, Alaska State Troopers, Anchorage Police Department, Alaska Medicaid Fraud Control Unit, and the State of Alaska Division of Insurance.

The Alaska Health Care Fraud Task Force (AHCFTF) is a partnership of local, state, federal, and private agencies focused on the investigation of health care fraud, waste, and abuse in Alaska or affecting Alaskan interests. For more information: <https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices/anchorage/alaska-health-care-fraud-task-force>

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