

January 10, 1995

Tallahassee Democrat

# Health-care fraud rampant and inadequately enforced

South Florida may be the capital of health-care fraud.

By Catherine Wilson  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS  
MIAMI

Abuse eats up 10 cents of every dollar spent on Medicare nationally. But in South Florida, the undeclared capital of health-care fraud, the figure is more like 20 cents.

Even with official recognition of widespread abuse, the risk of getting caught seems pretty small.

"So many people are doing it that word is getting out all over the state that it's easy to make money through health-care scams," U.S. Attorney Kendall Coffey said Monday.

Taking his crime-fighting campaign to the community, Coffey organized an unusual conference of about 180 regulators, law-enforcement officials, lawyers, insurers, health-care providers and social-service agencies to recruit help with enforcement.

He concedes he needs it.

Coffey has reorganized his white-collar crime section to put top priority on health-care fraud, which costs government and private insurance programs an estimated \$2.5 billion a year in South Florida alone. All forms of health-care fraud are expected to cost \$100 billion nationally this year.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has 33 agents investigating fraud at its Atlanta regional office. But only four positions are assigned to South Florida, and one of those is vacant.

Law-enforcement resources "are now woefully inadequate" even though every \$1 spent on anti-fraud activities translates to \$14 saved, he said.

George Clov, the FBI chief in Miami, hopes his request will be honored to double the 14 agents working on health-care scams.

The attorney general's office has 68 employees chasing such fraud statewide, but Attorney General Bob Butterworth said "if I moved all 68 to Dade County, it would not be enough."

A culture that tolerates what often is perceived as a nickel-and-dime fraud also is a contributing factor, Sen. Bob Graham said.

Offering one example that came out at a Senate hearing, he recalled testimony about elderly people who were offered free government milk and received a nutritional supplement intended for in-

travenous feeding.

The five cases cost Medicare \$737, but publicity about the everyday scam generated 80 letters to Graham's office from people with similar experiences.

Other common items supplied in Miami scams include oxygen nebulizers for people with no breathing problems. In other cases, Medicare was billed for orthopedic shoes, and patients "got Adidas, Nike and Reebok," Clow said.

Another scheme is a vertical medical monopoly: A "rolling lab" is a clinic set up with patient recruiters and crooked doctors and technicians to generate as many billings as possible in six months or less. Before law enforcement

catches on, the clinic has come and gone.

A key to most federal frauds is obtaining a patient's Medicare number, which is the same as a Social Security number. A clinic paid patients \$50 to \$100 each and bused them 122 miles from Fort Pierce for treatment in Miami, all to get the magic number. After that, thousands of dollars worth of bills could be run on the number without the patient realizing it.

Butterworth's office assumed health-care fraud responsibility from the state auditor-general's office last July, opening the door for the first time to cooperation with federal agencies on criminal investigations.

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Coffey has reorganized his white-collar crime section to put top priority on health-care fraud, which costs government and private insurance programs an estimated \$25 billion a year in South Florida alone. All forms of health-care fraud are expected to cost \$100 billion nationally this year.

January 11, 1995

DIARIO LAS AMERICAS

# Fiscales de Dade comienzan batalla contra el fraude al Medicare

Por VIVIAN CRUCET

La Fiscalía de EE.UU. en el Distrito del Sur de Florida ofreció este lunes un simposio en el hotel Intercontinental de Miami para anunciar el comienzo de la batalla en contra del fraude al Medicare.

"Enfrentamos un reto desalentador que reside en una enormidad que derrota soluciones. Raramente sabemos cuales individuos y agencias están trabajando para contener este problema y qué accesibilidad tienen al publico", comentó Kendall Coffey, Fiscal de EE.UU. para el Distrito Sur de Florida.

El simposio tenía como metas el presentar a las agencias y organizaciones responsables en la administración de varios componentes del sistema, incluyendo la investigación y persecución de los abusos del sistema; identificar la labor que cada gru-



Senador Bob Graham, Kendall Coffey, Fiscal de EE.UU. para el Distrito Sur de Florida y el Dr. Pedro José Greer en el Simposio donde se trazaron planes contra el fraude al Medicare. (Foto GORT).

po cívico en ayudar a corregir estos abusos y revisar propuestas de cambios legislativos.

Graham habló durante el almuerzo para señalar qué medidas consideraba apropiadas pa-

El Senador de la Florida Bob

(Pasa a la Pág. 2B, Col. 3)

August 19, 1995

The Miami Herald

# Best scam going

The punks sticking up convenience stores for \$50 really are chumps.

If they stayed in school, learned some arithmetic and to read the financial pages, they could dress better and pull down some really big bucks — with virtually no risk. Akiyoshi Yamada, for example, admits to bilking Medicare for \$120 million, his lawyer says. That's a lot of aspirin — more money than it takes to run the Securities and Exchange Commission and the Supreme Court for a year.

And get this: Prosecutors say he did it while on probation. Yes siree. Is this the land of opportunity, or what?

Yamada, a convicted felon, has a record of fraud and forgery in three states. Facing five years in federal prison after a 1987 conviction, he agreed to "cooperate" in stock-fraud investigations in New York and New Jersey. The sentence was stalled, then suspended. He finally paid a \$10,000 fine and was placed on five years probation. During this period, it's alleged, he set up his

**MEDICARE FRAUD**  
A convicted swindler allegedly ran a \$120 million health care scam — while on probation.

Miami-based Medicare scam, invoking the Fifth Amendment whenever his probation officer asked how he was making a living.

Yamada, his wife, and a convicted drug smuggler allegedly set up four dozen clinics from Fort Pierce to Miami, a billing service, even transport service to make sure his fake patients got to his phony clinics. But, heck, Medicare will write a check to anybody with the smarts to rent a post office box, ask for a provider number, and send a bill for "services."

Yamada's just "the biggest Medicare crook ever charged," as U.S. Attorney Kendall Coffey put it. Mr. Coffey has been waging a commendable war against this national scandal that Congress seems all too willing to ignore.

Yamada has agreed to plead guilty, according to his lawyer. That would earn him the full 15 years of prison that two counts of mail fraud and a probation violation call for. The crime deserves a long stay on a hard bunk — right next to the other punks.

Yamada's just "the biggest Medicare crook ever charged," as U.S. Attorney Kendall Coffey put it. Mr. Coffey has been waging a commendable war against this national scandal that Congress seems all too willing to ignore.

April 12, 1994

The Miami Herald

# Taxpayers shell out billions in Medicare fraud, panel told

"Getting that Medicare number is like getting a license to steal," said U.S. Attorney Kendall Coffey.