

ELDER JUSTICE INITIATIVE IN IOWA

The Iowa Senior Medicare Patrol sent me a stack of press releases from the US Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Iowa, describing the recent efforts of that office to prosecute lawbreakers who target senior citizens. By way of background, the press release explains that ten districts nationwide were selected in March 2016 to carry out an "Elder Justice Initiative", to "coordinate and support... law enforcement efforts and policy activities on elder justice issues". This is a pilot program, and much of it is taking aim at Medicare fraud relating to what they call "grossly substandard care" by Medicare providers. Take a look at the headlines from the press releases:

- Iowa Nursing Facility, Its Ownership, and Its Management Agree to Pay \$100,000 to Resolve Allegations that Residents Received Worthless Care
- Iowa Cancer Clinic and Oncologist to Pay More Than \$176,000 To Settle False Claims Act Allegations They Recklessly Billed for Cancer Drugs That Were Unapproved, Misbranded, or Counterfeit and Improperly Upcoded Office Visit Claims
- Iowa Home Health Company and Its President Agree to Pay \$1,000,000 To Resolve Allegations They Sought Reimbursement for Inappropriate Costs
- Iowa Dental Clinic and Its Owners Agree To Pay More Than \$300,000 To Resolve Allegations the Clinic Submitted Claims for Unnecessary Procedures or Procedures that Did Not Happen
- Central City Woman Sentenced to 14 Months in Federal Prison for Defrauding Her Grandfather
- Cedar Rapids Woman Sentenced to Federal Prison for Defrauding Elderly Couple out of More Than \$100,000
- Five Individuals Charged with Fraud Targeting Elderly Victims Throughout United States (more on this later!)

In one sense, this is outrageous to read these things happening, but in another sense, it's great news we are getting some focus on the issue. If you think this kind of pilot project needs expanded, make your views known to our federal legislators, Senators Charles Grassley and Joni Ernst, and Representative David Loebsack. One reason we might want an expanded initiative – Clinton County is in the Southern District of Iowa, not the Northern.

If you want to make a complaint about Medicare-provided services, or learn more about how to detect mistakes or fraud in Medicare, call the Iowa Senior Medicare Patrol at 800-423-2449.

MONEY MULES

A great deal of the money scammed from people in this country in schemes like the grandparent scam, IRS phone scam, government grants scam, and the like, ends up sent out of the US to overseas locations. That's because many of these scams are operated out of foreign countries. But we're learning it's a mistake to completely blame this on foreigners. In many cases, the scammers rely on folks in the US to help get the money out of the country. Previously in this column, I called attention to "FIVE INDIVIDUALS CHARGED WITH FRAUD TARGETING ELDERLY VICTIMS..." Those five are from Dubuque, just up the river. The press release tells us the five are part of a scheme in which "participants in the fraud would call a person on the phone and tell that person that a relative was in jail." The caller asked the victim to wire money via Western Union or Moneygram as bail money to get the relative released. Participants in the fraud picked up the wire transfers and sent the money overseas. So here's a scam that needed local help to succeed.

And we learn about more help from inside the US out of Florida. On February 15, 2017, the Federal Trade Commission charged a Florida man with running a company that collected \$1.5 million from 3000 victims. The Florida man, Joel Treuhft, hired "runners" to go to wire transfer agents, like Western Union and Moneygram, and collect transfers from victims of the IRS phone scam. Remember all those calls from phony IRS agents? Some of the folks who fell victim to that scam sent their money to wire transfer agents in Florida, where these "runners" collected it and later sent it scammers based out of India. My term for these "runners" is money mule.

DO NOT CALL REGISTRY NEWS

The Do Not Call Registry is our first line defense against telemarketing phone calls and robo-calls. If you register your phone number, telemarketers, unless you give them written permission, are prohibited from calling you. Some interesting statistics just came in on this registry. As of September 30, 2016, 226 million Americans registered their numbers. That's only an increase of three million from the previous year. But what is up greatly is the number of complaints of violations, going from 3.6 million to 5.3 million, almost a 50% increase in one year. I encourage people to make a complaint when they get a telemarketing or robo-call in violation of the registry. You can make a complaint the same way you register your phone – call 888-382-1222, or go to www.donotcall.gov. It's a very easy process.

I'm often asked, "I registered my phone a long time ago, is it still registered?" Most likely it is. In the early years of the project, we needed to re-register, but since 2007, registrations stay in effect without further effort by the consumer. You can verify if your phone is registered by calling or going to the Do Not Call website. That is also a very simple process.

There's no question a lot of crooked telemarketers just ignore the registry, but that doesn't mean nothing ever happens about it. The Federal Trade Commission announced on January 13,

2017, settlements in two cases of robo-callers blasting out millions of calls in violation of the registry. One of the defendants organized a company which made 1.3 million calls in one week, 80% to numbers registered with the Do Not Call Registry. These calls tried to sell a home security system. A federal judge imposed a \$1.4 million judgment on him.

In a second case, an enterprise controlled by one man made 329 million calls in three months in 2014, to all fifty states. These calls promoted extended auto warranties and home security systems. In this case, the judge imposed a \$9.9 million judgment.

The complaints made to the registry are one gauge the regulators use to decide where to focus their efforts on enforcement, so keep making those complaints.

CONTACT SENIORS VS. CRIME

Let me know about scams, fraud, or other crookedness you run across. Most of what I learn, I learn from you. Contact me at Seniors vs. Crime, Clinton County Sheriff's Office, 563-242-9211 extension 4433, or email me at randymeier@gapa911.us

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