

HEAT Strike Force Enforcement Takes an International Turn



(October 17, 2010): Medicare's HEAT Strike Force is actively tracking down wrongdoers. The FBI has [announced](#) the arrest of 73 defendants, a number of which are allegedly members of an international organized crime organization, as part of one of the largest criminal health care fraud cases ever brought. It is estimated that these individuals are responsible for the illegal submission of over \$163 million in fraudulent Medicare claims. As the FBI's Press Release reflects:

“. . .the defendants allegedly stole the identities of doctors and thousands of Medicare beneficiaries and operated at least 118 different phony clinics in 25 states for the purposes of submitting Medicare reimbursements.

As the FBI noted, the schemes employed by this group included the submission of fraudulent claims for medically unnecessary treatments and services to the Medicare program for payment by these “phantom clinics.” Indictments covering these defendants were issued in five states, California, Georgia, New Mexico, New York, and Ohio. Commenting on the multi-agency cooperation involved, the Press Release notes that:

“Today's arrests are an example of the FBI's ability to conduct cross-program, multi-divisional investigations targeting a national level threat. In recent years, the department has undertaken a series of steps to modernize its organized crime program and enable federal law enforcement to take a unified approach to combating international organized crime. The Attorney General's Organized Crime Council brings together the leadership of the FBI and eight other federal law enforcement agencies or offices with the department's prosecutors, focusing high-level attention on these issues. The IOC-2 provides support in the form of information and

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intelligence to the member agencies that enhance efforts to identify, penetrate and dismantle the most dangerous organized crime groups through investigations and prosecutions. The creation of the International Organized Crime Targeting Committee and the Top International Criminal Organizations Target (TICOT) List, directs investigators and prosecutors to concentrate their limited resources on those international organized crime groups that pose the greatest threat to the United States. The department's Criminal Division, through the Health Care Fraud Unit, Organized Crime and Racketeering Section, and the Asset Forfeiture and Money Laundering Section, has created new training programs to educate investigators and prosecutors on the intricacies of international organized crime and financial investigations. (emphasis added).

Commentary: As this case reflects, the ease and extraordinary profits which can be generated from health care fraud is more than enough incentive for international organized crime syndicates to move into this area. With the uncovering of this scheme, we should fully expect that DOJ, HHS-OIG and the [HEAT Strike](#) Force will continue to investigate these relationships.

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