Ohio Spine Surgeon Accused Of Bilking Medicare

A spine surgeon in the Cincinnati area has been charged with fraudulently billing Medicare and other health benefit programs for millions of dollars after subjecting patients to unnecessary operations.

The FBI arrested Dr. Atiq Durrani on Thursday on charges of health care fraud and making false statements in health care matters. He could face up to 25 years in prison if convicted on both.

Durrani has offices in suburban Evendale, Ohio, and Florence, Ky., with a private practice called Center for Advanced Spine Technologies. Federal authorities alleged that many patients wound up with worse neck and back pain after he performed unneeded spinal surgeries.

Durrani attorney Bruce Whitman said in court that the federal allegations don't consider the hundreds of thousands of people he has treated successfully. He said afterward that Durrani will defend against the charges in court.

Durrani returns to federal court Aug. 19. He was released with restrictions on his travel and the condition he write to any patients who have appointments to advise them of the allegations against him.

He also faces a slew of malpractice suits. Attorney Eric Deters, who represents 150 clients, applauded the federal charges.

"They are protecting the public from letting this happen again," Deters said.

Michael Lyon, who also represents Durrani, said the doctor is highly trained with a long track record.

"He's been practicing in this town since 1999. He's never paid a penny on a medical malpractice case. Nor has he ever had a serious complaint by any hospital," Lyon said.

One of those suing, Dana Setters of Trenton, Ohio, said she had a fusion surgery on her neck and a lower back surgery, and neither provided lasting relief from pain.

"He ended up saying, 'Don't worry, I'll fix you,'" she told WCPO TV of Cincinnati. "I'm in constant pain 24-7. I can't drive. I can't play or lift my little girl."

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