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Indictment Targets Diet Clinic "Pill Mill"

Cleveland, Ohio (Cuyahoga County) – State of Ohio Board of Pharmacy Executive Director Steven W. Schierholt and the Cuyahoga County Prosecutor Timothy J. McGinty, announced the owner and key employees of three now-shuttered Greater Cleveland area diet clinics — including a doctor and a nurse — have been indicted for running a pill mill that illegally sold more than a million doses of weight loss medication.

A 227-count indictment returned by the Grand Jury charges Janet Paulino, Virginia Paulino, Dr. Rogaciano Trocio and Maria Siwik with Engaging in a Pattern of Corrupt Activity (commonly known as RICO), Drug Trafficking and Money Laundering stemming from the operation of "Diet Med Clinics" in Mayfield Heights, Fairview Park and Mentor. The clinics have been closed since March 25, 2015, when a law enforcement task force led by investigators from the State of Ohio Pharmacy Board executed search warrants at all three locations and seized large quantities of drugs as well as medical and financial records.

Janet Paulino, 70, owned the clinics. Her 46-year-old daughter Virginia worked for her, as did Ms. Siwik, 47, a nurse, and Dr. Trocio, 75, a physician who investigators say used his credentials to purchase large quantities of scheduled stimulants. Investigators learned that the doctor had little or no contact with patients as hundreds of thousands of doses were dispensed directly from the clinics. This method of distribution enabled customers to bypass pharmacies where the amount and duration of a patient's use might have raised red flags.

Over the course of 18 months, investigators – including a visibly pregnant woman – were able to purchase drugs at the clinics with little regard for standard medical screening or practice.

"There was no medical care. No doctor-patient relationship. None," said Assistant County Prosecutor James A. Gutierrez. "People came to these so-called clinics, paid their money and

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received their drugs.”

Under standard medical practice, patients might take the amphetamines distributed by these clinics for up to three months and under a doctor’s supervision. Some customers of Diet Med Clinics had been buying them for years.

“These clinics were mere fronts to traffic scheduled stimulants while performing sham medical treatments,” the indictment states. “There was no legitimate therapeutic purpose to distribute these scheduled stimulants over the time frame or in the quantities given.”

Doctors warn that improper use of phentermine, the drug trafficked by the Paulino clinics, can cause heart attack, kidney failure, seizures and death, and can lead to dependency and addiction.

“Controlled substance stimulants used for weight loss, can be harmful to patients who are not properly monitored by a physician,” said Jesse L. Wimberly, a spokesman for the State of Ohio Board of Pharmacy. “This indictment shows the commitment by Local, State and Federal Law Enforcement to investigate prescribers who knowingly fail to offer legitimate care to their patients.”

The agencies involved in the investigation included the Ohio High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area task force, the Ohio Medical Board, the Ohio Nursing Board, the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the West Shore Enforcement Bureau, the Suburban Police Anti-Crime Network, the Lyndhurst Police Department, the Lake County Narcotics Agency, the Mentor Police Department, the Lake County Prosecutor’s Office and the Cuyahoga County Prosecutor’s Office.

All four defendants are scheduled to be arraigned September 1 in Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Court.

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