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PRESS RELEASE

Fraudulent Nursing Diploma Scheme Leads to Federal Charges Against 25 Defendants

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For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Southern District of Florida

MIAMI – More than two dozen individuals have been charged in the Southern District of Florida for their alleged participation in a wire fraud scheme that created an illegal licensing and employment shortcut for aspiring nurses.

According to three recently unsealed indictments returned by a South Florida federal grand jury and two informations filed by federal prosecutors, defendants engaged in a scheme to sell fraudulent nursing degree diplomas and transcripts obtained from accredited Florida-based nursing schools to individuals seeking licenses and jobs as registered nurses (RNs) and licensed practical/vocational nurses (LPN/VNs).

The bogus diplomas and transcripts qualified purchasers to sit for the national nursing board exam and, after passing it, to obtain licenses and jobs in various states as RNs and LPN/VNs. The overall scheme involved the distribution of more than 7,600 fake nursing diplomas issued

by three South Florida-based nursing schools: Siena College in Broward County, Fla., Palm Beach School of Nursing in Palm Beach County, Fla., and Sacred Heart International Institute in Broward County. These schools are now closed.

Each defendant faces up to 20 years in prison.

“Not only is this a public safety concern, it also tarnishes the reputation of nurses who actually complete the demanding clinical and course work required to obtain their professional licenses and employment,” said U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Florida Markenzky Lapointe, who added that “a fraud scheme like this erodes public trust in our health care system.”

Crimes such as these unfortunately continue to spring up, especially in this area.

“Health care fraud is nothing new to South Florida, as many scammers see this as a way to earn easy, though illegal, money,” said acting Special Agent in Charge Chad Yarbrough, FBI Miami. “What is disturbing about this investigation is that there are over 7,600 people around the country with fraudulent nursing credentials who are potentially in critical health care roles treating patients. Were it not for the diligence and hard work of the investigators on this case, the extent of this fraud may not have been discovered.”

The charges speak to the purpose of a nursing license which is to protect the public from harm by setting minimum qualifications and competencies.

“The alleged selling and purchasing of nursing diplomas and transcripts to willing but unqualified individuals is a crime that potentially endangers the health and safety of patients and insults the honorable profession of nursing,” said Special Agent in Charge Omar Pérez Aybar of Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General (HHS-OIG). “In coordination with our law enforcement partners, HHS-OIG continues to aggressively investigate bad actors who so brazenly disregard the well-being of others in order to enrich themselves fraudulently.”

Charges Related to Fraudulent Nursing Diplomas and Transcripts from Siena College.

U.S. v. Witherspoon, et al., case no.: 23-60005-Cr-Smith

U.S. v. Sanon, case no.: 23-60013-Cr-Moreno

The charging documents describe Siena College as a Broward County school licensed by the Florida Commission for Independent Education and the Florida Board of Nursing that offers a Practical Nursing Program and an RN to Bachelor of Science in Nursing Program. Eugene Sanon managed Siena College.

The indictment charges defendants Stanton Witherspoon of Burlington County N.J.; Alfred Sellu of Burlington County N.J.; and Rene Bernadel of Westchester County, N.Y. with conspiring to

commit and committing wire fraud. The indictment alleges that Witherspoon, Sellu, and Bernadel solicited and recruited individuals who sought nursing credentials to gain employment as an RN or LPN/VN. It is alleged that these defendants arranged with Sanon, who managed Siena College and is charged by information with wire fraud conspiracy, to create and distribute false and fraudulent diplomas and transcripts. These fake documents represented that the aspiring RN and LPN/VN candidates had attended Siena College's nursing program in Broward County and completed the necessary courses and clinicals to obtain RN or LPN/VN diplomas. In fact, the aspiring nurses never completed the necessary courses and clinicals.

The information against Sanon alleges that he and others sold thousands of fake Siena College nursing diplomas and educational transcripts to nursing applicants who used them to obtain RN or LPN/VN licenses in various states and nursing jobs with unwitting health care providers throughout the country.

Charges Related to Fraudulent Nursing Diplomas and Transcripts from Palm Beach School of Nursing.

U.S. v. Russ, et al., case no.: 23-60007-Cr-Singhal

According to the charging documents, Palm Beach School of Nursing's objective was to prepare students to meet Florida's licensing and nursing board requirements and become eligible to take the national licensing exam in order to work as registered nurses.

The indictment charges Gail Russ of Broward County; Cheryl Stanley of Collier County, Fla.; Krystal Lopez of Palm Beach County; Ricky Riley of Broward County; Norberto Lopez of Palm Beach County; Damian Lopez of Palm Beach County; Francois Legagneur of Nassau County, N.Y.; Reynoso Seide of Union County, N.J.; Cassandre Jean of Palm Beach County; Yelva Saint Preux of Suffolk County, N.Y.; Evangeline Naissant of Nassau County, N.Y.; Rony Michel of Monmouth County, N.J.; Vilaire Duroseau of Essex County, N.J.; and Yvrose Thermitus, a/k/a "Yvrose Thompson," of Union County, N.J., with conspiring to commit, and committing, wire fraud. The indictment alleges that these defendants solicited and recruited individuals who sought nursing credentials to gain employment as an RN or LPN/VN.

It is alleged that these recruiter defendants then arranged with Palm Beach School of Nursing's owner Johanah Napoleon and school employees Gail Russ, Cheryl Stanley, Krystal Lopez, and Ricky Riley to create and distribute false and fraudulent diplomas and transcripts representing that the aspiring RN and LPN/VN candidates had attended Palm Beach School of Nursing and completed the necessary courses and clinicals to obtain RN or LPN/VN diplomas. In fact, the aspiring nurses never completed the necessary courses and clinicals.

The nursing applicants used the fake diplomas and transcripts they purchased from the owner and employees of Palm Beach School of Nursing to obtain RN or LPN/VN licenses in various states and nursing jobs with unwitting health care providers throughout the country. Napoleon

was previously charged by information and has pled guilty to conspiring to commit health care fraud and wire fraud, as well as wire fraud (case nos. 22-60111-Cr-Smith and 22-60118-Cr-Smith).

Charges Related to Fraudulent Nursing Diplomas and Transcripts from Sacred Heart International Institute

U.S. v. Jean, et al., case no.: 23-60010-Cr-Smith

U.S. v. Etienne, case no.: 23-60012-Cr-Singhal

According to charging documents, Sacred Heart International Institute was a Broward County School licensed by the Florida Board of Nursing that offered a nursing program designed to prepare students for employment as practical nurses.

The indictment charges Ludnie Jean of Harris County, Texas; Serge Jean of Harris County, Texas; Simon Itaman of Harris County, Texas; Anna Itaman of Harris County, Texas; Rhomy Louis of Suffolk County, N.Y.; and Nadege Auguste of Broward County with conspiring to and committing wire fraud. It is alleged that these defendants solicited and recruited individuals who sought nursing credentials to gain employment as an LPN/VN. These recruiters then arranged with Charles Etienne, Sacred Heart's owner, to create and distribute false and fraudulent transcripts and diplomas representing that the aspiring candidates had attended Sacred Heart and completed the necessary courses and clinicals to obtain LPN/VN diplomas. In fact, the aspiring nurses never completed the necessary courses and clinicals. Etienne is charged by information with conspiracy to commit wire fraud.

The nursing candidates used the fake diplomas and transcripts they purchased from Sacred Heart to obtain LPN/VN licenses in various states and nursing jobs with unwitting health care providers throughout the country.

U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Florida Markenzy Lapointe; acting Special Agent in Charge Chad Yarbrough, FBI, Miami Field Office; and Special Agent in Charge Omar Perez Aybar, HHS-OIG, made the announcement.

FBI Miami and HHS-OIG Miami investigated these cases. Valuable assistance was provided by Homeland Security Investigations, Miami Field Office; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs-Office of Inspector General; United States Postal Inspection Service, Miami; and Florida Attorney General-Florida Medicaid Fraud Control Unit, Mid-Atlantic Field Office. Assistant U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Clark is prosecuting this case and Assistant U.S. Attorney Nicole Grosnoff is handling asset forfeiture. This case is being prosecuted in conjunction with a related criminal matter in the Eastern District of Maryland.

Related court documents and information may be found on the website of the District Court for the Southern District of Florida at www.flsd.uscourts.gov or at <http://pacer.flsd.uscourts.gov>

Click here to access charging documents.

[23-CR-60005](#)

[23-CR-60007](#)

[23-CR-60010](#)

[23-CR-60012](#)

[23-CR-60013](#)

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