



Department of Justice

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Niles Physician Pleads Guilty to Illegally Prescribing Controlled Substances and Healthcare Fraud

Investigators ask public to report tips to the FBI at 216-583-5353

CLEVELAND – Jeffrey Sutton, 65, a physician who practiced in Niles, Ohio, until early 2022, pleaded guilty in federal court on Monday, Jan. 30, 2023, to 31 counts of illegally prescribing patients opioids and other controlled substances, one count of illegally distributing controlled substances, and 20 counts of healthcare fraud.

According to court documents, from January 2015 through January 2022, Sutton knowingly prescribed medically unnecessary controlled substances to patients outside of the usual course of professional practice and without a legitimate medical purpose. In doing so, court documents state that Sutton caused health care benefit programs to be fraudulently billed for both office visits and the controlled substances.

As part of his conduct, court documents state that Sutton prescribed opioid medications to patients for extended periods, including for over a decade, with little change in regimen and despite knowing that the opioid therapy treatment had failed. Court documents go on to state that Sutton also prescribed short-acting opioid therapy medications to patients for extended periods without establishing treatment goals, pain diagnoses, accurate examinations, and either without any medical imaging or with medical imaging that could not justify the opioid prescribing.

Court records show that, among his patients, Sutton escalated opioid dosages to extreme levels, sometimes increasing the dosage by more than 1,000% and sometimes prescribing more than 22 times the level of opioids that the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention identified as posing a risk of overdose requiring increased scrutiny. Sutton combined those opioids with other medications like benzodiazepines, a combination that has been known to cause serious risks of slowed or difficult breathing, coma, and death. Sutton also ignored documented behaviors that indicated patients were abusing or diverting prescribed controlled substances or abusing non-prescribed controlled substances like cocaine and fentanyl.

In addition, Sutton admitted that he ignored warnings provided by prescription drug management organizations, insurance carriers, and state authorities about his high prescribing and danger to patients. He also admitted to ignoring and choosing not to act on patient requests to lower dosages.

Sutton also admitted to engaging in sexual acts with patients to whom he directly prescribed controlled substances, including during office visits. He also admitted to delivering dozens of oxycodone pills to the home of a patient with whom he was engaged in a sexual relationship, outside the course of treatment and without a valid prescription.

Finally, Sutton also pleaded guilty to fraudulently causing healthcare benefit programs to pay for patients to receive the medically unnecessary controlled substances and office visits that Sutton required patients to attend to obtain those prescriptions.

Federal investigators are asking anyone who would like to alert investigators to experiences or observations of Jeffrey Sutton's practice of medicine or other issues to contact the Cleveland FBI at **216-583-5353**.

Sutton is scheduled to be sentenced on May 23, 2023.

This case was investigated by the Cleveland FBI, Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Department of Health and Human Services Office of the Inspector General (HHS OIG), and the State of Ohio Board of Pharmacy. This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Elliot Morrison.

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