



2023 NHCAA

Awards Program

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NHCAA



1-800-Get-Thin United States of America v. Omidi, et al.

The National Health Care Anti-Fraud Association is proud to present the investigation and prosecution teams in the case of **1-800-Get-Thin** with a **2023 Investigation of the Year Award**. Formally United States of America v. Omidi, et al., the case involves notorious West Hollywood former dermatologist Julian Omidi and his Beverly Hills-based company Surgery Center Management, LLC (SCM).

This investigation stands as the largest health care fraud scheme in Southern California in the last 20 years. At the heart of the scheme was Julian Omidi, a former physician whose California medical license had been revoked in 2009. He, along with his brother and mother, owned and operated a marketing and healthcare empire called 1-800-Get-Thin that comprised 19 owned or leased ambulatory surgical centers. This network of entities focused on the promotion and performance of the bariatric procedure known as Lap-Band weight-loss surgeries.

Omidi established a policy requiring prospective Lap-Band patients – even those with insurance plans he knew would never cover the surgery – to undergo at least one sleep study, and employees were incentivized with commissions to make sure the studies took place. Many patients were subjected to a battery of diagnostic procedures over a period of several months. They might undergo ultrasounds, lab tests, EDGs, colonoscopies, or multiple sleep studies.

After patients underwent sleep studies and other tests and procedures – irrespective of whether any doctor had ever determined they were necessary – employees, acting at Omidi’s direction, often falsified the results. Omidi then used the falsified results to support 1-800-Get-Thin’s pre-authorization requests for Lap-Band surgery.

Relying on the results and documentation, insurers often authorized payment for some of the proposed Lap-Band surgeries. And even if surgery was not approved, 1-800-Get-Thin was still able to submit claims for the previous tests and procedures, including approximately \$15,000 per sleep study.

Health insurer Anthem launched an investigation into Omidi in 2009, in response to numerous member complaints that coincided with a sudden and dramatic increase in Lap-Band surgeries. Through the course of its investigation, Anthem identified and monitored over 250 unique entities/TINs associated with the scheme.

The media played a key role in this case, first by helping drive business to Omidi’s 1-800-Get-Thin empire through prolific billboard and radio advertising, but then also aided in its downfall through publicity around 1-800-Get-Thin’s medically negligent practices, resulting in the deaths of at least five people and many malpractice lawsuits. The Anthem SIU team aided the media’s reporting on 1-800-Get-Thin. As negative media attention grew, it prompted state and federal leaders to call for hearings and investigations. The increased coverage and scrutiny gave law enforcement the ability to bring more resources to bear in their investigation of 1-800-Get-Thin.

Around 2010, the FDA and the FBI launched a joint investigation into 1-800-Get-Thin and Omidi that expanded to include DCIS, IRS, and California Department of Insurance investigators. It was a complicated investigation due to its sheer size. In February 2017, the U.S. Attorney's Office, Central District of California convened a Grand Jury, which returned a 42-count indictment. After delays caused by several changes to Omidi's legal team and the COVID-19 pandemic, the case went to trial in September 2021.

At the conclusion of a three-month trial that included testimony by 150 witnesses, a federal jury in December 2021 found Omidi and SCM guilty of 28 counts of wire fraud and three counts of mail fraud. Omidi also was found guilty of two counts of making false statements relating to health care matters, one count of aggravated identity theft and two counts of money laundering. Omidi and Surgery Center Management, LLC were also found guilty of conspiracy to commit money laundering.

On April 17, 2023, Omidi was sentenced to 84 months in federal prison. Beyond Anthem, victim health care benefit programs included Aetna, Allied, Cigna, HCSC, Health Net, OPM, SC UFCW, Tricare, and UnitedHealthcare. On July 25, 2023, restitution was ordered in the amount of \$11.2 million against Omidi as well as forfeiture in the amount of \$98 million.

CONGRATULATIONS TO

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