

Johnson Sentenced

Local News

Posted by: David Haviland

Posted on : March 29, 2012 at 7:00 pm

ABERDEEN, Wash. - Antoine Johnson, 41, a former resident of Aberdeen, Washington, and his mother, Lawanda Johnson, 63, were sentenced today in U.S. District Court in Tacoma for more than two dozen federal felonies connected with their operation of four health care clinics in Western Washington, announced U.S. Attorney Jenny A. Durkan. The Johnsons were convicted in November 2011, following a three-week jury trial. Antoine Johnson was sentenced to 151 months in prison, three years of supervised release, and \$1,281,873 in restitution for 24 counts of health care fraud, four counts of filing false income tax returns, and five counts of illegal drug distribution. Lawanda Johnson was sentenced to 87 months in prison, three years of supervised release, and \$1,227,746 in restitution for 24 counts of health care fraud and six counts of filing false income tax returns. Orders of criminal forfeiture of funds were also entered. Sentencing them to the high end of the guidelines range, U.S. District Judge Ronald B. Leighton said the Johnsons "manipulated the standard of care for patients, they have manipulated the rules of reimbursement, they manipulated the Hippocratic Oath, they manipulated the Justice system...they have invented more excuses than they distributed pills."

"Antoine Johnson not only defrauded taxpayers, he betrayed his oath as a doctor to "do no harm." Instead of healing his patients, he fed their addiction for narcotic painkillers to satisfy his own greed," said U.S. Attorney Jenny A. Durkan. "Mother and son ruined many lives, sent the bill to taxpayers, and then filed false tax returns." According to testimony at trial and records in the case, in 2008, law enforcement investigated information obtained by the Grays Harbor County Drug Task Force and the Washington State Medicaid Fraud Control Unit that the clinics were dispensing a high number of prescriptions for narcotic pain medications without examining the patients. Antoine Johnson was the only medical doctor employed by the four clinics, the "Broadway Clinic" in Aberdeen and the "Johnson Family Practice" clinics in Tacoma, Lakewood, and Lacey. Dr. Johnson churned out prescriptions for Schedule II controlled substances such as Oxycodone and Methadone. Evidence introduced at trial indicated that these clinics had thousands of patients and over half of those patients were prescribed controlled substances by Dr. Johnson. These prescriptions were refilled for months and years at a time. Often, the patients would come to the clinic, get their weight and blood pressure taken by a nursing assistant, and then pick up a Schedule II prescription that had been pre-signed by Dr. Johnson. Sometimes a family member of a patient would pick up a prescription for another family member but was required to pay a \$75 or \$100 fee to the clinic for the signed prescription. "One of the things Mr. Johnson claimed he did was serve disadvantaged communities, but he actually caused them great harm," said Laura M. Laughlin, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI Seattle office. "Mr. Johnson turned patients into addicts and facilitated others in drug dealing. This is an egregious case of someone who is well placed to heal and treat deserving people but instead used his medical license to advance his greed at the expense of his neighbors' health." The health care fraud investigation began following an audit by the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) of Medicaid billing practices at the clinics. Testimony and evidence at trial showed that the clinics, through their business manager, Lawanda

Johnson, and their only medical doctor, Antoine Johnson, consistently billed for a higher level of service than was actually provided. Evidence introduced at trial showed that the clinic routinely billed Medicaid and Labor and Industries for high-level service even though a patient was only in the clinic for a refill of a controlled substance medication and only had the patients' vitals taken. "Dr. Johnson and his mother inflated bills for office visits and had taxpayers pick up the tab. Worse yet, too often, little or no medical services were provided other than writing prescriptions for highly addictive pain pills," said Ivan Negroni, Special Agent in Charge for the Office of Inspector General of the Department of Health and Human Services region serving Washington. "As in this case, we will work in tight coordination with state and other federal agencies to shut off the flow of dangerous prescription drugs." "Today's sentencing of Dr. Johnson and his mother sends a clear message to rogue physicians who dispense medications to patients without regard for their health, while stealing our nation's precious healthcare dollars," said Kenneth J. Hines, the IRS Special Agent in Charge of the Pacific Northwest. "IRS will investigate when greed is the motivation for medical professionals to betray their patients. Our role in this case included determining the total amount of loss to the American taxpayer from both the tax and health care frauds." The Johnsons closed their clinics and left the United States shortly after search warrants were executed at the four clinics and the residence of Lawanda Johnson in January 2009. The pair fled the United States, driving to Canada, from where they flew to Scotland and then to Madagascar. The United States State Department worked with the FBI and Madagascar authorities, resulting in the return of the Johnsons to the United States, where they were arrested and held for trial. The Department of Health revoked Dr. Johnson's license to practice medicine while the Johnsons were in Madagascar. Dr. Johnson's efforts to contest the revocation of his license upon his return to the United States were unsuccessful. The case was investigated by the FBI, the Health and Human Services Office of the Inspector General (HHS-OIG), and the Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigations (IRS-CI). The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Susan Loitz and Brian Werner. For additional information please contact Emily Langlie, Public Affairs Officer for the United States Attorney's Office, at 206-553-4110 or Emily.Langlie@USDOJ.Gov.