

Wilkesboro Lab Operator Pleads Guilty

Written by Steve Frank
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The former owner of Wilkesboro Clinical Laboratory pleaded guilty today in U.S. District Court for his involvement in a health care fraud scheme in which he and his company billed Medicare for services which were not rendered. Anne M. Tompkins, U.S. Attorney for the Western District of North Carolina said Louis Francis Curte, 49, also admitted he filed false tax returns from 2007 to 2010. In a separate civil settlement with the U.S. Attorney's Office, Curte also agreed to pay \$300,000 to resolve civil fraud allegations that he and his company violated the Physician Self Referral Act or "Stark Law." Curte appeared before U.S. Magistrate Judge David C. Keesler today and pleaded guilty to four counts of health care fraud and one count of filing a false tax return. According to court documents and today's plea hearing, Curte was the owner and operator of Wilkesboro Clinical Laboratory, which was enrolled with Medicare to provide microbiology and other laboratory services. Court records show that from at least 2007 to in or about 2009, Curte defrauded Medicare by submitting false and fraudulent claims for microbiology services which were never rendered. According to the plea agreement, the intended loss to Medicare by the defendant was between \$10,000 and \$30,000. At today's hearing, Curte also pleaded guilty to filing false tax returns for the years 2007 through 2010. According to filed documents and court proceedings, Curte filed false tax returns which substantially understated his gross income, and therefore, the tax owed to the United States. Court records indicate that Curte maintained false books in an attempt to mask a prohibited business relationship with a physician, identified in court documents as Dr. T.M. Curte faces a maximum term of 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine for the health care fraud charges and a maximum term of three years in prison and a \$250,000 fine for the tax fraud charge.