

Federal Sentences in Sparta Medicaid Scheme

Written by Steve Frank
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An Alleghany Co. woman was sentenced on Monday to serve 40 months in prison and two years of supervised release for health care fraud conspiracy and money laundering, announced Anne M. Tompkins, U.S. Attorney for the Western District of North Carolina, joined by Attorney General Roy Cooper, who oversees the North Carolina Medicaid Investigations. Betty Ann Cook, 56, of Sparta, N.C., pleaded guilty on April 25, 2012, to one count of health care fraud conspiracy and one count of money laundering conspiracy. According to court documents and court proceedings, Cook was the owner of Families First Home Health Care, a home health care company located in Alleghany Co., N.C. Cook's company was enrolled with Medicaid to provide personal care services ("PCS") such as bathing, dressing, and eating to Medicaid recipients. From December 2006 to about October 2010, the release says Cook participated in a scheme to defraud Medicaid by submitting false and fraudulent claims to Medicaid. Co-conspirators, which included PCS aides and Medicaid recipients, participated in a "fee-splitting" scheme, billing Medicaid for patient care services that were not rendered and then splitting the fraudulently obtained Medicaid reimbursements among the co-conspirators. As a result of the fee-splitting scheme, Cook received over \$150,000 as payment to the fraudulent claims. Fourteen others—many listing Sparta addresses—have been sentenced to federal probation for their part in the scheme, according to the release. They are:

- Jessica Beth Absher-Shelton, 33, of Anderson, S.C.
- Patricia Atkins, 62, of Low Gap, N.C.
- Billie Jo Bingman, 34, of Sparta.
- Crystal Brewster, 34, of Sparta.
- Lisa Marie Cook, 35, of Sparta.
- Rena Mahan, 32, of Sparta.
- Desiree Payne, 22, of Sparta.
- Dwana Sanchez, 36, of Sparta.
- Tammy Williams, 43, of Laurel Springs, N.C.
- Jessica Cook, 27, of Sparta.
- Dietra Michelle Bottomley, 38, of Ennice, N.C.
- Tammy Atkins, 43, of Mount Airy, N.C.
- Amy Lyall, 39, of Sparta.
- Deborah Aroche, 49, of Sparta