



The City of New York
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**DOI STATEMENT ON ARRESTS OF CITY HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES AND A LAWYER
CHARGED IN INSURANCE FRAUD SCHEME**

ROSE GILL HEARN, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Investigation (“DOI”), issued the following statement regarding the arrests today of six employees of the City’s Health and Hospitals Corporation (“HHC”), one former HHC employee and one private attorney on bribery charges in connection with an insurance fraud scheme in which City hospital employees received money for delivering confidential patient information to personal injury lawyers. Undercover investigators from DOI and the office of New York State Attorney General Andrew M. Cuomo worked together to find the facts that resulted in charges against more than two dozen individuals and entities since July 2009. The office of New York State Attorney General Cuomo is prosecuting the cases.

DOI Commissioner Rose Gill Hearn said, “These arrests revealed a network of schemers charged with trafficking in confidential patient information from City hospitals for personal profit. Investigators from DOI, the Attorney General’s Office and HHC’s internal Inspector General (IG) worked tirelessly to expose the facts and reveal the many participants in this complex scheme – City hospital employees, professional health care workers and lawyers – who now face charges for trading on their integrity to pad their pockets.

In its role as the City external watchdog, DOI has recommended to HHC’s internal IG several improvements to help safeguard against this type of corruption, including standardizing hospital visiting protocols and strengthening protection of confidential patient information by closely tracking who accesses patient information on hospital computers. City hospital employees are entrusted with protecting extremely sensitive patient information and as these arrests show those who ignore that obligation will be prosecuted and place their careers at risk.”

The following individuals have been arrested:

- William Hamel, 45, of Bethpage, N.Y., an attorney with the Manhattan law firm of Dinkes & Schwitzer, has been charged with Bribery in the Third Degree, a class D felony. Upon conviction, a class D felony is punishable by up to seven years in prison.

The following six HHC employees and one former HHC employee have each been charged with Bribe Receiving in the Third Degree, a class D felony, and Official Misconduct, a class A misdemeanor. Upon conviction a class A misdemeanor is punishable by up to a year’s incarceration:

- Prabhudial Balkaran, 46, of the Bronx, a Nurse’s Aide who has been employed at Lincoln Hospital for 15 years.

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- Odalis Caraballo, 56, of the Bronx, a Housekeeping Aide who has been employed at Lincoln Hospital for 17 years.
- Benito Figueroa, 50, of the Bronx, a Nurse's Aide/Transport Escort who has been employed at Lincoln Hospital for 20 years.
- Vanessa Marte, 26, of Manhattan, currently a New York State Parole Officer, and a former Hospital Care Investigator who was employed at Lincoln Hospital for nearly 3 years.
- Franklin Martinez, 54, of Mamaroneck, N.Y., a Clerical Associate who has been employed at Lincoln Hospital for 27 years.
- Natasha Samuels, 27, of the Bronx, a Licensed Practical Nurse who has been employed at Lincoln Hospital for 5 years.
- Kenton Wright, 49, of the Bronx, an Associate Supervising Radiographer who has been employed at Jacobi Hospital for 7 years.

DOI's investigation was conducted by the DOI General Counsel's Office and the squad of New York City police detectives assigned to DOI.

Commissioner Gill Hearn thanked New York State Attorney General Andrew M. Cuomo, and his staff, for their prosecution of the cases. Commissioner Gill Hearn also thanked HHC Inspector General Norman Dion and his staff for their assistance in this investigation.

Assistant Attorneys General Joseph D'Arrigo, Peter Kolp, and Jeff Minett and Special Assistant Attorney General Lisa Lee from the Office of New York State Attorney General Andrew M. Cuomo are prosecuting the cases.

Criminal complaints are accusations. Defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty.

DOI is one of the oldest law-enforcement agencies in the country. The agency investigates and refers for prosecution City employees and contractors engaged in corrupt or fraudulent activities or unethical conduct. Investigations may involve any agency, officer, elected official or employee of the City, as well as those who do business with or receive benefits from the City.

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