

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

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“Medical Nightmare in Detroit”

It sounds like a medical nightmare is being uncovered in Detroit, Michigan. Hematologist-oncologist Farid Fata, MD was arrested August 6, 2013 and charged with Medicare fraud that involves \$35 million. Worse than that is the nature of the alleged violations of safe medical practices. Prosecutors said that the 48-year-old Dr. Fata ordered toxic chemotherapy for patients who did not have cancer or whose cancer was in remission and that he has been "simply poisoning the patient." Some employees at Dr. Fata's high-profile practice challenged his actions before he was arrested and one employed oncologist told agents from the FBI and the Department of Health and Human Services that he discovered that Dr. Fata had ordered chemotherapy for a patient whose cancer was in remission. Others reported that Dr. Fata ordered intravenous immunoglobulin (IVIG) for patients whose antibody levels did not warrant the therapy. Also, employees challenged other practices they considered unethical, such as fabricating cancer diagnoses in patient records to justify insurance claims for chemotherapy and positron emission tomography (PET) scans. Of course, Fata "vehemently denies all the allegations." Dr. Fata faces substantial time in prison, especially if unwarranted chemotherapy has injured or killed patients. Surprisingly, Fata had a "shiny career" as both a researcher and author of scientific papers. Still, Fata named himself founder of Swan for Life (and his wife as Treasurer), a nonprofit organization to support and educate cancer patients and which had nearly a million dollars in assets in 2011. Many charges center on Dr. Fata's use of chemotherapy to patients who did not need it. One Nurse Practitioner told federal agents that "Dr. Fata falsified cancer diagnoses to justify cancer treatment and patients whose cancer was in remission were put on "maintenance" doses of chemotherapy. Allegedly, Dr. Fata told patients that once they had chemotherapy, "they had to have it for the rest of their lives" and he ordered chemotherapy for all patients with advanced cancer who would not benefit from it. The American Society of Clinical Oncology said that administering chemotherapy to patients with advanced cancer, who would not benefit from it, is 1 of 5 practices that oncologists must abandon. Fata required patients to get their chemo-drugs through "his pharmacy" and he would allegedly give doses over four times the standard. Fata also owned the firm that did the PET scans. Reportedly, with an expanded staff, Fata only personally spent 3-5 minutes with patients.

In the America that I love, please be wary of questionable medical practices and remain alert concerning possible medical malpractice. It can and does happen, sometimes right under your nose. Always ask questions involving treatments you do not understand and if in doubt, get a second opinion. Protect yourself!

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