



FINANCIAL SCANDAL UNCOVERED IN LONG BEACH NURSING HOME

Criminals Face Seven Years for Grand Larceny

Rebekah Rombom 07/13/2005 4:43 pm

Two former officials at the Park Avenue Extended Care Center in Long Beach pleaded guilty on Monday to grand larceny and agreed to pay \$205,000 each in restitution to the facility, where they were charged with stealing more than \$400,000. The mother of one of the defendants was also involved in the scheme, and pleaded guilty to larceny but will not pay restitution.

Brian Lawrence, 37, and Bryan Cassinera, 30, used their nursing agency, Magnolia Staffing Inc., to hire unqualified workers and submit fraudulent invoices to Park Avenue, a court document filed by the state attorney general's office says. Lawrence and Cassinera charged Park Avenue for bogus services and hours that were never worked, then diverted the money for their own use.

Magnolia hired Lawrence's mother, Winifred John, 57, to work as a registered nurse at Park Avenue when she was licensed only as a personal care aide, according to the attorney general's office. John's falsely inflated qualifications allowed her to secure a higher salary than she would have received otherwise. John's attorney says that she was not making money off of the scheme, and court documents state that Lawrence and Cassinera "diverted the proceeds [of John's salary] for their own personal gain." Lawrence and Cassinera also hired other individuals who were not licensed, to fill positions as licensed professionals.

Though Lawrence and Cassinera interacted with patients, there have been no formal allegations of harm to Park Avenue residents. John's attorney James Galleshaw, however, maintains that she never treated any patients.

"The bottom line is, my client was a pawn in somebody

else's scheme," he says. "Unfortunately, she took her son's word."

Galleshaw says that John didn't even know she was being hired as a registered nurse. "She was told to sign some documents, and she signed them," he says. "She didn't know what was going on, honestly."

Ray Cash, who is representing Lawrence, and Scott Brettschneider, who is representing Cassinera, both say their clients cooperated fully with the state attorney general's office.

"[Cassinera] went in, pled guilty, and from the very beginning he's recognized his responsibility in this particular case and done everything possible to provide whatever information was necessary for its closure," Brettschneider said.

Sentencing is scheduled for September 26, and they face a maximum of seven years in prison.