



# BCPO News

**Scott A. Coffina, Prosecutor**



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**December 4, 2019**

## **Former Bordentown Physician Charged with Narcotics Distribution and Fraud**

Burlington County Prosecutor Scott Coffina announced today that narcotics distribution and fraud charges have been filed accusing a former physician of illegally prescribing thousands of highly-addictive opioid pills out of his Bordentown Township practice while simultaneously engaging in an unlawful medical billing scheme.

Morris "Moishe" Starkman, 60, of Yellowstone Road in Cinnaminson, was charged with eight counts of Distribution of a Controlled Dangerous Substance (Second Degree), four counts of Healthcare Claims Fraud (Second Degree) and two counts of Insurance Fraud (Second Degree).

He was taken into custody November 22 following the execution of a search warrant at his home during which multiple electronic devices were seized, along with business, financial and medical records. Starkman was released following a first appearance in Superior Court. The case is being prepared for presentation to a grand jury for possible indictment.

The investigation determined that between January 1, 2015 and January 1, 2018, Starkman issued prescriptions through his Bordentown Family Practice for nearly 1,400,000 total doses of opioids, including Oxycodone (OxyContin, Percocet, Roxicodone, Endocet), Hydrocodone (Vicodin, Norco, Lorcet, Lortab), Oxymorphone (Opana), Hydromorphone (Dilaudid), morphine and fentanyl.

The eight patients outlined in the criminal charges filed against Starkman received 11 doses of opioids per day on average during that period. One patient alone was prescribed 17,460 doses, which equates to more than 15 per day. They each received anywhere from four to ten times the maximum dose recommended by the Centers for Disease Control.

The investigation revealed that Starkman would perform – at most – cursory examinations on patients before prescribing large amounts of opioids without medical justification, consideration of whether his patients were benefitting from the prescription painkillers he routinely and repeatedly prescribed, or exploration of the underlying causes for their pain.

Starkman maintained inadequate records on his patients which failed to document treatment plans for pain management or opioid use, or provide a legitimate medical purpose for prescribing such high quantities for an extended period of time. The reliance of his patients on the highly-addictive opioids he was prescribing insured they would frequently return to the practice for refills and be charged for an office visit.

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“He was one of the top prescribers in New Jersey,” Prosecutor Coffina said. “The number of opioids he prescribed for the three-year period reviewed during the investigation was enough to provide in excess of three doses to every man, woman and child residing in Burlington County.

“It is well documented that prescription opioids lay at the origin of the devastating drug use epidemic we are experiencing today. Around 80% of heroin users started with prescription drugs. Physicians who have abandoned their medical judgment and indiscriminately prescribed opioids to patients they knew or should have known were becoming addicted to them must be held accountable for their role in this ongoing health crisis.”

The investigation also revealed that Starkman, during that same time, submitted fraudulent health care claims to insurance companies for over \$50,000 for services that were unauthorized, not eligible for reimbursement, not provided as represented or not rendered.

Starkman first came to the attention of law enforcement officials in late 2016 after an insurance company contacted authorities with a suspicion of illegal activity at his practice due to the high volume of opioid prescriptions he was writing.

The State Board of Medical Examiners temporarily suspended Starkman’s license in August 2017. Under a consent order reached in April 2018, Starkman agreed to permanently surrender his license to practice medicine in New Jersey.

Records seized from Starkman’s practice revealed that one of his patients fatally overdosed in May 2015, two months after his last visit to the Bordentown office.

The records indicated that during a visit in December 2014, Starkman continued to prescribe Oxycontin to the patient, despite noting that he was “slurring and falling asleep” during the visit. The following month, when the patient visited the office because he was “sick” and “ran out of all meds early again,” Starkman wrote him a prescription for a higher dosage of Oxycodone. During the patient’s final visit in March 2015, Starkman prescribed him 120 additional Oxycodone pills, despite noting that three days earlier he had been discharged from week-long stay at a mental health and addiction treatment facility where he had sought help for anxiety and panic attacks.

Due to insufficient evidence connecting his prescriptions to the patient’s fatal overdose, Starkman was not criminally charged in connection with the patient’s death.

Starkman will be prosecuted by Michael Angermeier, Supervisor of the BCPO Gang, Gun and Narcotics Task Force, Josh Dennis, Supervisor of the Insurance Fraud Unit, and First Assistant Prosecutor Philip S. Aronow.

The case was investigated by the BCPO Gang, Gun and Narcotics Task Force and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration’s Diversion Control Division, with assistance from the New Jersey Division of Consumer Affairs Enforcement Bureau, the New Jersey Division of Criminal Justice, Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield Special Investigations, and the National Insurance Crime Bureau.

*All persons are considered innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.*

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