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June 08, 2009

Failed transplant leads officials to Ormond fugitive

By JULIE MURPHY
Staff Writer

Erwin Langier was promised a lifesaving liver transplant when he traveled to the Philippines last year, but federal officials say instead the Canadian lived out his last days in a foreign hospital, away from his wife.

She stayed behind to handle the financial arrangements for her dying husband. And, nearly \$100,000 later, what she is left with are memories tainted by the knowledge she was duped by a former Ormond Beach psychiatrist who investigators say started scamming people internationally more than 40 years ago.

When the FBI tracked down Jerome Howard Feldman, 68, in the Philippines in February, he had already eluded prosecution in the United States for nearly 10 years, and close to \$50 million in federal fines went unpaid.

According to court documents, among other illegal schemes, Feldman ripped off the Medicare and Medicaid system in a billing scam at three clinics he owned in the mid-1990s, including one in Daytona Beach. Feldman would bill the Medicaid program for large quantities of AIDS infusion therapy drugs, but never provided the drugs to several patients and even billed for patients no longer being treated, officials say.

As Feldman hid from his legal troubles, a judge in 2001 ordered the fugitive to pay the federal government \$46 million, damages and civil penalties, to the Medicare and Medicaid programs. The same year the Attorney General's Office also charged him with racketeering, conspiracy to commit racketeering, fraud, grand theft, money laundering and dealing in stolen property.

Feldman's medical license was revoked in 2002.

LIVER TRANSPLANT SCAM

While it may be no consolation to his grieving widow, it is because of Langier's death that Feldman -- who used at least nine aliases -- was ferreted out.

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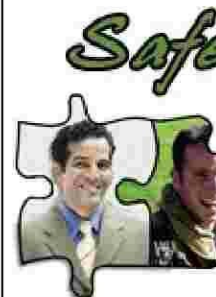
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Multiple scams

Jerome Feldman, 68, a former Ormond Beach psychiatrist, has been involved in more than one medical scam, according to the FBI, including one in which he brokered live organs internationally, in part, by using as many as nine aliases. Here are some of the details that led the investigation to Feldman.

FAKE ID's: "Alberto Gomez" opened both a UPS box and a bank account in Dewitt, N.Y., to conduct his organ transplant scheme. He produced a Mozambique international drivers permit, a photo identification, which investigators compared to a known photograph of Feldman. Another alias, "Michael Adams," whose British passport photo was also compared to Feldman's, used a credit card to make purchases in Manila, and a phone number linked to Feldman. Adams also had a joint bank safe deposit box with Feldman's late mother-in-law.

FAMILY PROBLEMS: E-mail messages between Feldman and his wife, Bonnie Feldman, show them bickering about money, with her complaining that he wasn't sending her enough. He said he didn't leave the United States because of her demands for him to make more money, but to avoid a "25-year vacation."



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CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

Investigators believe Feldman operated a human organ transplant scheme while living as a fugitive from justice in the Philippines. He used his many aliases to run his online organ transplant brokerage, www.liver4you.org, and continued to bait potential victims until he was arrested.

According to the FBI, Feldman conducted different aspects of the business as Alberto Jennaro Gomez, Alberto Gomez, Al Gomez, Mitch Michaelson, Mitchel Michaelson, Dr. Mitch Michaelson, Michael Adams, David Smith and David Dow Smith.

His web of deception began to unravel when the Dewitt (N.Y.) Police Department took a complaint from Victoria Langier, who paid for the liver transplant for her 55-year-old husband. She contacted Dewitt police because all of her payments were wire transferred to a bank there.

LEGAL TROUBLES: That "25-year vacation" is possible if Feldman is convicted on Florida charges that he filed 1,776 false claims to Medicare for partial hospitalization services, and 5,750 false claims to Medicaid for psychiatric services. He is also charged with the illegal purchase and resale of stolen pharmaceuticals that netted him nearly \$2 million.

— Julie Murphy

SOURCE: FBI

Erwin Langier and a family friend traveled to the Philippines for his transplant less than a week after the procedure was paid for with money wired to "Alberto Gomez" at the instruction of "Dr. Michaelson" -- May 31, 2008. His health deteriorated shortly after their arrival and his friend brought him to the local emergency room, court documents show.

It was then that Feldman demanded more money from Victoria Langier, via "Dr. Michaelson," so another doctor could perform the surgery within two weeks, a report states. This was done, though neither Victoria Langier nor the family friend spoke to any hospital personnel who knew "Dr. Michaelson" or his alleged associates, or of any arrangements made on Erwin Langier's behalf, the report states.

Though the Filipino government placed Erwin Langier on its transplant eligibility list, he died there of liver failure on July 11. Even worse, Victoria Langier was required to pay more than \$20,000 in hospital fees -- on top of the \$70,000 total she sent to Alberto Gomez, which was to have been an all-inclusive fee.

Several messages left at the home of Victoria Langier were not returned.

There are at least six suspected victims worldwide who were taken for a known \$324,985, and money was transferred to "Michael Adams" as well as to Feldman's wife and children, according to reports.

FLORIDA CLINICS SCAM

Besides billing the Medicaid program in the 1990s for large quantities of AIDS infusion therapy drugs that were never provided, investigators believe Feldman recruited elderly and poor patients -- insured by Medicare, Medicaid or both -- from assisted-living facilities and private residences for group therapy.

He had them taken by van to one of his facilities in Orlando that is described in court documents as an "abandoned warehouse in disrepair with no running water or kitchen facilities" where they would be for six to seven hours a day, five days a week.

Investigators contend Feldman hired unlicensed individuals to provide the group therapy, including his (then) teenage son, a maintenance man and the van drivers who brought the patients to the facility, according to court documents. They also contend many of the patients didn't need group therapy or didn't have afflictions where group therapy would have been a benefit, and the sessions were deemed "social, recreational and diversionary rather than psychotherapeutic."

Feldman wasn't around when his medical license was revoked in 2002.

Court records show he left "in or about" 1999, when investigators began looking into his Medicare and Medicaid billing practices as well as his treatment of patients, and could not be located until the FBI tracked him down to the Philippines last year.

Feldman won't be extradited to Florida to face criminal charges here until he stands trial in New York on federal wire fraud charges. He was extradited to Syracuse on April 1 from Guam where he was held after being arrested early in February.

Investigators obtained search warrants for a Yahoo account used by Feldman that may reveal how he went about his business.

In an e-mail message to one of his sons dated June 17, 2008 -- one day before Victoria Langier made her second payment to "Alberto Gomez" -- Feldman wrote, "In the past 9 months I have made about \$30,000. It is harder than pulling teeth to get money out of people even if they face severe health problems or even death, without my help. I am trying to get another \$30,000 from the above person, but it ain't a sure thing."

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