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Attorney General Bob Butterworth News Release

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Mental Health Facility Staff Arrested On Medicaid Fraud Charges

MIAMI -- The entire therapeutic and administrative staff of a Miami community mental health facility was arrested this morning on charges of Medicaid fraud, Attorney General Bob Butterworth and Statewide Prosecutor Melanie Ann Hines announced.

The arrests followed a seven-month investigation of the Prometeo Counseling Center Inc., a day treatment mental health facility at 1720 SW 8th Street with an average caseload of about 145 patients a month. Among those arrested were the facility's two owner-operators, the staff **psychiatrist**, two mental health counselors and a billing supervisor.

"Prometeo was paid \$1.2 million in Medicaid funds last year for providing what appears to have been little or no meaningful therapy for its clients," Butterworth said.

Because the arrests prevented the center from opening this morning, two Spanish-speaking crisis intervention counselors from the Department of Children and Families were assigned at Butterworth's request to meet client needs.

According to the attorney general's Medicaid Fraud Control Unit investigators, the counseling and administrative staff at the Prometeo Day Treatment Center:

- Gave kickbacks of as much as \$50 a month to people willing to enroll as Medicaid eligible mental health clients.
- Billed Medicaid for counseling absent clients, including clients who were actually in jail or hospitalized during the days Prometeo submitted bills for their "therapy sessions."
- Created fictitious psychiatric evaluations and bogus group therapy notes.
- Offered daily "group therapy" sessions consisting of the distribution of free coffee and bread, socializing and listening to music.

Butterworth said a Spanish-speaking undercover fraud control agent posing as a Medicaid patient with emotional problems was immediately enrolled as a mentally ill patient without undergoing a psychiatric evaluation.

"The agent observed no organized activities of any kind at Prometeo," Butterworth said. "Everyone seemed to do nothing more than drink coffee, smoke cigarettes, watch television and talk. Counseling sessions consisted of 20 to 30 minutes of discussing any topic the clients chose followed by 20 to 30 minutes of sitting in the dark listening to music."

Butterworth noted that the center billed Medicaid for the 17 "therapy sessions" the agent attended, as well as another 16 sessions she did not attend. Investigators also uncovered other instances where the center billed Medicaid for sessions that clients did not attend.

Following her fifth session, Butterworth added, the agent met for the first and only time with the center's **psychiatrist** who, after only a 10 minute discussion, suggested the agent be hospitalized. After the agent strongly objected to hospitalization, the **psychiatrist** wrote and handed her a prescription for Prozac.

Arrested today and charged with multiple counts of engaging in an organized scheme to defraud were:

- Co-owner Yolanda Aranzazu, 51, of 111980 SW 112 Ave., Miami.
- Co-owner Lucila Bernal, 58, of 135 Hampton Lane, Key Biscayne.
- Staff **psychiatrist** Dr. Francisco Borges, 71, of 2430 NW 103 Ave., Pembroke Pines.
- Office Manager Martha Martinez, 44, of 9310 Fountainbleau Blvd., Miami.
- Counselor Graciela Noble, 56, of 321 NW 109 Ave., Miami.
- Counselor Fernando Roche, 34, of 2516 SW 20 St., Miami.

Aranzazu, Bernal, Martinez, Noble and Roche also face multiple charges of Medicaid fraud. Each charge is a third degree felony with a maximum penalty of five years in jail and a \$10,000 fine.