

NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 12, 2007

Associate of Egg Harbor City Doctor Sentenced to 33 Months for Scheme to Defraud ALS Patients

(More)

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CAMDEN – An Egg Harbor City woman was sentenced today to 33 months in federal prison for conspiring with Dr. Charlene C. DeMarco, who purported to be able to “cure” amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), often referred to as "Lou Gehrig's disease," to defraud ALS patients and their families, U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Christie announced.

U.S. District Judge Joseph H. Rodriguez also ordered Elizabeth Lerner, 40, a.k.a. “Elizabeth Copperman,” a.k.a. “Liza,” of Egg Harbor City, to make restitution to victims in the amount of \$35,390 and to pay a \$7,500 fine. Judge continued the defendant’s release with electronic monitoring pending her surrender to the U.S. Bureau of Prisons on Jan. 17.

On Dec. 8, 2006, a jury in federal court convicted Lerner and DeMarco, 55, a former doctor of osteopathy with a practice and residence in Egg Harbor City, of all charges contained in an 11-count Indictment. The defendants were both convicted of one count of conspiracy to commit mail and wire fraud, three counts of mail fraud, six counts of wire fraud and one count of money laundering.

On Sept. 5, 2007, U.S. District Judge Joseph H. Rodriguez sentenced DeMarco to 57 months in federal prison and ordered her to make restitution to victims in the amount of \$32,190 and to pay a \$7,500 fine.

On March 30, 2006, the defendants were arrested by Special Agents of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Office of Criminal Investigations, on the Indictment, which was returned on March 29.

In convicting the defendants, the jury found that from October 2002 until November 2004, DeMarco and Lerner agreed with each other to defraud ALS patients and their families.

During the trial, the jury heard the testimony of 24 government witnesses and viewed hundreds of pieces of evidence regarding the defendants’ scheme to falsely claim that DeMarco, a doctor of osteopathy specializing in the treatment of Lyme disease, could treat ALS patients with stem cell therapy. In doing so, DeMarco induced the patients’ families to pay for such treatment, even though DeMarco would not and could not have provided the promised treatments. Families of the victimized patients paid up to \$35,000 to the defendants in anticipation of treatments that were never performed.

According to trial testimony and evidence, the defendants attempted to defraud four patients and their families, all of whom reside in Louisiana, of more than \$140,000 in total and successfully obtained more than \$40,000 through the scheme. The jury heard details of numerous false statements made by the defendants to the patients and their families, including that DeMarco had previously received FDA approval to treat ALS

using stem cells. The jury also heard how the defendants illegally laundered the funds they received from their scheme and used the proceeds for their own personal expenses.

Christie credited Special Agents of the FDA's Office of Criminal Investigation, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Kim A. Rice, in the Washington Field Office, with the investigation leading to the Indictment.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Eugenia A.P. Cowles of the Criminal Division in Trenton and Camden, respectively.

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Defense Attorney: Linda Friedman Ramirez, Esq. St. Peterburg, Fla.