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SC dentist admits Medicaid fraud; agree to pay back \$800,000

COLUMBIA, S.C. — A South Carolina pediatric dentist will pay back \$800,000 in taxpayer money after admitting to billing Medicaid for children's dental procedures he never actually performed, the South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (SCDHHS) announced Thursday.

C. Lynwood Bramlett, DMD, a Columbia resident practicing in Bishopville, first came to the attention of SCDHHS Program Integrity investigators in July 2010. Using data mining and other techniques, investigators noticed an unusually high volume of claims for expensive types of fillings, prompting them to begin a review of patient records. An audit of two year's worth of claims and other records, such as x-rays from other dentists who later saw Bramlett's patients, revealed that he was routinely billing Medicaid for procedures he never rendered.

Citing declining patient volume as his motivation, Bramlett admitted to investigators that he was falsifying claims and agreed to pay back \$800,000 to the Medicaid program. Bramlett was prosecuted by the SC Attorney General's Medicaid Fraud Control Unit and pleaded guilty on April 27 to one count of a felony computer crime. He was ordered to pay a \$50,000 fine and received a five-year sentence, suspended to one year probation, and must complete 150 hours of community service. The guilty plea means he will be excluded as a South Carolina Medicaid provider and was referred to the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services for exclusion from other state Medicaid programs.

Over the last five years, SCDHHS recovered more than \$20 million from providers who engaged in Medicaid fraud and abuse. Over the past 10 months, the South Carolina Dental Association has worked in partnership with SCDHHS and its claims contractor, DentaQuest, to identify and reduce fraud and other abuse in the dental program. The department is in the process of aggressively expanding its fraud and abuse activities to other areas.

"Every time a dishonest provider cheats the system, they are stealing money from their honest colleagues and from the taxpayers," said SCDHHS Director Tony Keck. "I congratulate our Program Integrity staff and the state's Attorney General's Office for holding this provider responsible for his actions."

Anyone who suspects fraud and abuse in the Medicaid program is encouraged to call the Medicaid Fraud Hotline toll-free at (888) 364-3224.