

Former VA Hospice Nurse Charged with Diverting and Tampering with Morphine Meant for Dying Veterans

A Tewksbury woman was charged today in federal court in Boston with diverting morphine while employed as a nurse in the hospice unit at the Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center campus in Bedford.

Kathleen Nofle, 55, was arrested this morning and charged by criminal complaint with one count of obtaining a controlled substance by misrepresentation, fraud, deception, and subterfuge, and one count of tampering with a consumer product. Nofle will make an initial appearance in federal court in Boston at 12:00 p.m. today.

According to charging documents, on Jan. 13, 14, and 15, 2017, Nofle used her position as a nurse to obtain doses of morphine that were meant to be given to the veterans under her care in the hospice unit. Nofle admitted to federal agents that she mixed water from a sink with a portion of the liquid morphine doses, and then administered the diluted medication to patients orally. Nofle then allegedly ingested a diluted amount of the remaining drug. The investigation revealed that, due to diluted morphine administered by Nofle, one veteran experienced increased difficulty breathing (dyspnea) and increased suffering in his final days. The investigation also found that before working at the VA Medical Center in Bedford, Nofle had resigned from her position as a nurse at a different hospital following her failure to follow appropriate procedures when wasting narcotics on 60 occasions.

The charge of obtaining a controlled substance by

misrepresentation, fraud, deception, and subterfuge, provides for a sentence of up to 10 years in prison, three years of supervised release, and a fine of up to \$250,000. The charge of tampering with a consumer product provides for a sentence of no greater than four years in prison, one year of supervised release, and a fine of up to \$250,000. Sentences are imposed by a federal district court judge based upon the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

United States Attorney Andrew E. Lelling and Sean Smith, Special Agent in Charge of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Inspector General, Northeast Field Office made the announcement today. Assistant U.S. Attorney William B. Brady of Lelling's Health Care Fraud Unit is prosecuting the case.