

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

A Tewksbury woman was indicted today by a federal grand jury in Boston on charges of diverting morphine while employed as a nurse in the hospice unit at the Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center campus in Bedford.

Kathleen Noftle, 55, was charged by indictment with one count of tampering with a consumer product and one count of obtaining a controlled substance by misrepresentation, fraud, deception, and subterfuge. Noftle was arrested and charged by criminal complaint in this case in September 2019.

According to charging documents, on Jan. 13, 14, and 15, 2017, Noftle 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. Noftle admitted to federal agents that she mixed water from the sink with a portion of the liquid morphine doses, and then administered the diluted medication to patients orally. It is alleged that Noftle then ingested a diluted amount of the remaining drug. The investigation revealed that, due to diluted morphine administered by Noftle, one veteran may have 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, Noftle 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 tampering with a consumer product 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 obtaining a controlled substance by misrepresentation, fraud, deception, and subterfuge, provides for a sentence of up to 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.

The details contained in the charging documents are allegations. The defendant is presumed to be innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.