

Massachusetts nurse pleads guilty to tampering with liquid morphine

A registered nurse pleaded guilty today in federal court in Worcester in connection with tampering with morphine prescribed to a nursing home resident in her care.

Gwen Rider, 42, of Northborough, pleaded guilty to one count of tampering with a consumer product and one count of obtaining a controlled substance by fraud and deception. U.S. District Court Judge Timothy S. Hillman scheduled sentencing for Aug. 15, 2022. Rider was arrested and indicted in April 2021.

Rider was a registered nurse employed by a Worcester County nursing home. From approximately 11:00 p.m. on Nov. 6, 2020 until 7:00 a.m. the following morning, Rider was on duty in a unit specializing in care for residents suffering from dementia. During her shift and while entrusted with the care of a resident suffering from dementia, Rider tampered with a bottle of morphine sulfate prescribed to the patient by removing some of the morphine and adding water to the remaining supply. Morphine sulfate is a Schedule II controlled substance under federal law. A nurse on a subsequent shift administered the adulterated morphine to a patient before the tampering was discovered.

The charge of tampering with a consumer product provides for a sentence up to 10 years in prison, up to three years of supervised release and a fine of \$250,000. The charge of obtaining a controlled substance by fraud and deception provides for a sentence of up to four years in prison, up to one year of supervised release and a fine of \$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 Rachael S. Rollins; Jeffrey Ebersole, Special Agent in Charge of the Food and Drug Administration, Office of Criminal Investigations; Margret R. Cooke, Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health; and Phillip Coyne, Special Agent in Charge of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General made the announcement today. Valuable assistance was also provided by the Northborough Police Department. Assistant U.S. Attorney John T. Mulcahy and Kristen M. Noto of Rollins' Criminal Division are prosecuting the case.