

Office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor for the City of New York

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Physician's office manager supplied drug trafficker with illegal Rx's for \$165,000 in painkillers

BRIDGET G. BRENNAN, New York City's Special Narcotics Prosecutor, New York City Police Commissioner RAYMOND W. KELLY and New York State Commissioner of Health NIRAV R. SHAH, M.D., M.P.H., announced today the indictment and arrest of an office manager for a Cobble Hill, Brooklyn neurologist and a prescription drug trafficker, who conspired to illegally steal and forge prescriptions for approximately \$165,000 in hydromorphone, a potent opioid painkiller sold under the brand name of Dilaudid, over the course of two years.

SYREETA JONES, who worked as an office manager at the Cobble Hill medical practice for nearly 20 years, was arrested following a six-month probe. JONES surrendered this afternoon at the New York City Police Department's (NYPD) 19th Precinct. The investigation was spearheaded by 19th Precinct anti-crime detectives, the Office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor's Prescription Drug Investigation Unit and investigators with the New York State Health Department's Bureau of Narcotics Enforcement (BNE).

Also named in the new 244-count indictment is IRA SUTTON, the alleged drug trafficker who received prescriptions from JONES and who was previously arrested in connection to this case in March. The new indictment contains multiple counts of Conspiracy, Criminal Possession of a Controlled Substance, Criminal Possession of a Forged Instrument, Forgery, Petit Larceny and Criminal Possession of Stolen Property.

JONES is expected to be arraigned on the new indictment as soon as this afternoon in Manhattan Supreme Court before Judge Melissa C. Jackson, Part 23. SUTTON is scheduled to be arraigned on September 30.

Between February 2011 and March 2013, JONES allegedly stole 48 prescription sheets from the medical practice where she worked and supplied them to SUTTON -- all without her physician employer's knowledge. JONES allegedly wrote each of these prescriptions for 360 pills of Dilaudid and forged the physician's signature.

In an effort to evade detection, JONES limited the number of prescriptions she stole to a maximum of four per month. The prescriptions were initially written in SUTTON's name. In July 2012, JONES also began writing prescriptions in the names of two of SUTTON's relatives, his father IRA BROWN and his brother-in-law RUSSEL RIVERA. When pharmacists contacted the doctor's office to verify prescriptions, JONES fielded these calls.

Throughout the conspiracy, JONES and SUTTON communicated via text message. SUTTON provided JONES with the names to appear on the prescriptions, while JONES instructed him as to the best time to pick up the prescriptions from the Cobble Hill office - for example, when the doctor was at lunch.

SUTTON, BROWN and RIVERA filled 46 of the prescriptions for a total of 165,600 pills at various pharmacies in the Upper East Side and Gramercy sections of Manhattan, and in Flushing, Queens. They paid for the prescriptions in cash. These pills can be sold on the street for \$10 each, for a total value of approximately \$165,000.

The scheme unraveled in March 2013, when anti-crime detectives with the NYPD's 19th Precinct stopped SUTTON, BROWN and RIVERA in a car in the vicinity of 83rd Street and Lexington Avenue in Manhattan. Officers had observed BROWN and RIVERA emerge from a pharmacy, each carrying medication, and enter a vehicle with tinted windows and Florida license plates. They stopped the car when SUTTON, who was driving, made an illegal turn.

Questioned about the medication they had just received, BROWN and RIVERA were unable to name the type of drug or the doctor who had prescribed it. All three men were taken into custody. A search of the vehicle yielded two prescriptions for Dilaudid that had been dated for the future, which is illegal.

Detectives alerted the Brooklyn neurologist to the suspicious prescriptions and subsequently learned that they had been forged. The physician reported that he never prescribed Dilaudid to his patients -- a fact that was later substantiated by BNE records.

Soon thereafter, the physician received a call from a pharmacist seeking to verify a suspicious prescription for Dilaudid. The physician spoke to the pharmacist personally, as JONES was not present in the office to intercept the call. As a result of the car stop and the call from the pharmacist, the physician determined that JONES had been stealing and forging prescriptions from his office and JONES's employment was terminated.

Following the March arrests and the termination of JONES, NYPD detectives, BNE investigators and members of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor's Prescription Drug Investigation Unit reviewed cell phone records, text messages, prescription records and other evidence to support charges in the new indictment.

BROWN pleaded guilty to Criminal Possession of a Controlled Substance in the Third Degree and Criminal Possession of a Forged Instrument in the Second Degree last month. RIVERA's case is still pending before Judge Melissa C. Jackson.

Special Narcotics Prosecutor BRIDGET G. BRENNAN thanked the Brooklyn District Attorney's Office, the New York City Police Department (NYPD) and the New York State Department of Health's Bureau of Narcotic Enforcement (BNE).

"This case demonstrates how even responsible medical practitioners can be victimized. A trusted employee was able to evade detection for years," BRIDGET G. BRENNAN said. "It was only after the actions of vigilant police officers, and a thorough investigation by members of my office and BNE, that the full scope of the criminal scheme came to light."

Police Commissioner RAYMOND W. KELLY said, "Greed drove these subjects to put others at risk of drug addiction or worse, but NYPD anti-crime detectives from the 19th Precinct recognized suspicious activity outside a pharmacy on Manhattan's Upper East Side and made the appropriate car stop and

original inquiries that led to the suspects' arrests. I commend the NYPD investigators involved and the attorneys in Special Narcotics Prosecutor Brennan's office on their work, and thank the legitimate doctor whose license was exploited, for his cooperation and assistance in this case."

BNE Director TERENCE J. O'LEARY said, "The State Health Department is proud to have assisted the Office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor and NYPD in their exemplary work of detecting this criminal activity and confirming that a practitioner's DEA registration and prescription paper were being abused by a criminal enterprise. As of August 27, the Department is pleased to provide prescribers access to their prescribing histories through the new Prescription Monitoring Program Registry. This registry enables prescribers to independently monitor their DEA numbers and identify misuse of their DEA-license. This tool, coupled with continued partnerships between law enforcement and public health authorities, will help us curb the prescription drug abuse epidemic."

INDICTED DEFENDANTS

CHARGES

Syreeta Jones
684 Putnam Ave.
Brooklyn, NY 7/4/1973

Conspiracy 4th -- 1 ct
Criminal Possession of a Forged Instrument
2nd -- 48 cts
Forgery 2nd -- 48 cts
Petit Larceny -- 48 cts

Ira Sutton
191 Riverdale Ave.
Brooklyn, NY
8/5/1980

Conspiracy 4th -- 1 ct
CPCS 3rd -- 3 cts
Criminal Possession of a Forged Instrument
2nd -- 48 cts
Criminal Possession of Stolen Property 5th --
48 cts

The charges and allegations are merely accusations and the defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty.