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## **Feds drop fraud charges against Staten Island doctor in one case; charges remain in a second case**

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The U.S. Justice Department moved to dismiss health-care fraud and conspiracy charges against Dr. Billy N. Geris "in the interests of justice and the efficient use of government resources," according to a recent filing in Brooklyn federal court.

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STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- The government has dropped criminal charges against a Staten Island doctor accused in a Medicare fraud scheme that allegedly occurred in a Queens medical office where he once worked.

The U.S. Justice Department moved to dismiss health-care fraud and conspiracy charges against Dr. Billy N. Geris "in the interests of justice and the efficient use of government resources," according to a recent filing in Brooklyn federal court.

But Dr. Geris, who has an office in Eltingville, isn't out of the woods just yet.

He still faces health-care conspiracy and mail-fraud conspiracy charges in an unrelated case pending in Manhattan federal court.

In 2011, Dr. Geris was among 91 people charged -- including physicians and other medical professionals -- with participating in a Medicare billing scheme that allegedly ripped off \$295 million.

The suspects were accused of paying kickbacks to Medicare beneficiaries who were prescribed medically unnecessary services. Those fraudulent claims for physical therapy and diagnostic tests were submitted to Medicare for payment, prosecutors said.

The alleged scam was run out of the Solstice Wellness Center in Rockaway Park, Queens, between January 2009 and April 2010.



Dr. Billy N. Geris has been licensed to practice in the state since 1996.

Dr. Geris, 54, previously told the Advance he worked part-time at Solstice Wellness for several months beginning in late 2009 and ending in early 2010. Court papers contain no allegations against his Staten Island office.

The New Jersey resident maintained he never paid any kickbacks or prescribed bogus services.

Dr. Geris said his indictment was likely due to bad timing -- his work at the center overlapped the period when the alleged crimes occurred.

The internist has been licensed to practice in the state since 1996 and has a spotless disciplinary history, according to online state Health Department records.

Dr. Geris' lawyer in the Brooklyn case said the physician wept on learning those charges were dismissed.

"Billy Geris was completely innocent," said attorney Joseph Tacopina. "The U.S. attorney's office doesn't dismiss a case after indictment unless they're convinced of an individual's innocence."

A spokesman for the U.S. Justice Department declined comment on the dismissal.

Dr. Geris, however, is still on the hook in the Manhattan federal court case.

He was among three dozen suspects arrested last year in an alleged \$279 million no-fault insurance fraud scheme. Federal prosecutors said the suspects set up "medical fraud mills" at which patients received medically unnecessary treatments for injuries allegedly suffered in car accidents.

Dr. Geris has denied the allegations.

Besides the Manhattan case, Dr. Geris was the subject of an unrelated civil lawsuit brought by the New York City Police Department in state Supreme Court, St. George, in 2011.

Police endeavored to shut down the doctor's Hylan Boulevard office, alleging it was used twice in 2010 as a "house of prostitution."

Dr. Geris and his civil lawyer, Robert Prignoli, have vigorously denied the allegations, contending the physician had no knowledge of illegal activity.

They said Dr. Geris, whose office is on the first floor, had leased out the second floor, where the purported prostitution occurred, to an acupuncturist and massage therapist. The tenant was subsequently evicted, they said.

Prignoli could not immediately be reached for comment on Friday, and the case's disposition could not immediately be determined.