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Texas Dentists Pay \$3.1M To End Medicaid Fraud Claims

By [Katie Buehler](#)

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Law360 (May 17, 2021, 6:56 PM EDT) -- Two North Texas dentists and their affiliated companies agreed to pay \$3.1 million to resolve claims they defrauded the state's Medicaid program by either overbilling for dental services or billing for services never rendered, the [U.S. Department of Justice](#) said.

Gunjan Dhir and Gaurav Puri, both 43, who are husband and wife, agreed Thursday to settle fraud claims filed against them in May 2017 by three whistleblowers. The couple was accused of violating the False Claims Act by offering kickbacks to patients who used their services and to marketers who referred patients, providing unnecessary or excessive dental services, overbilling for services and falsifying dental records to support the overbilling, according to a complaint filed in the Northern District of Texas.

The couple operated 35 dental clinics statewide that served primarily low-income children enrolled in the Texas Medicaid program, as well as various dental management companies that provided management and administrative services to the clinics, according to the DOJ.

"These defendants knowingly defrauded Medicaid, a program that provides medical coverage for more than 4 million low-income Texans," acting U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Texas Prerak Shah said in a statement. "If they thought they could get away with this scam by targeting underprivileged populations, they were sorely mistaken."

According to the DOJ, Dhir and Puri submitted false claims for payment to the Texas Medicaid program from May 30, 2011, to May 30, 2017. They also submitted claims using erroneous Medicaid provider numbers, misrepresenting the

dentists who performed the procedures.

Two former regional managers who worked for the couple until 2015 — Nelda Torres-Brown and Sonia Cardoso — and the current director of billing and compliance for all dental practices, Sandy Puga, reported the couple's scheme, according to court documents.

Dhir and Puri encouraged dentists they hired to generate high bills by offering them a bonus equivalent to 30% of the billings they generated, the whistleblowers claimed. This allegedly led to dentists seeing a "far greater" number of Medicaid patients each day "than proper dental care would permit," according to the complaint.

They also instructed the dentists to bill simple procedures under more expensive billing codes. For example, dentists were told to bill simple extractions as surgical extractions and to bill simple cleanings as more expensive deep scaling procedures.

According to court records, the couple would recruit customers by offering free dental services to the parents or other family members of children enrolled in Medicaid. And they offered marketers who referred patients to the clinics a \$10 per head "bounty," according to the complaint.

The whistleblowers also reported that Dhir would routinely drill holes in the healthy molars of young children, and then fill the holes in so he could bill the government, and would routinely submit Medicaid claims that children between the ages of 4 and 10 received 12 to 18 sealant treatments per visit, according to court documents.

The DOJ filed its joint stipulation of dismissal on May 12, asking the court to dismiss all claims against the couple and their businesses with prejudice, according to court documents.

The DOJ was represented by Kenneth G. Coffin and Braden Civins of the [U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Texas](#).

The whistleblowers were represented by Mark H. Schlein and Diane Marger Moore of [Baum Hedlund Aristei & Goldman PC](#).

Counsel information for Dhir, Puri and their businesses wasn't available Monday.

The case is United States of America et al. v. Puri et al., case number [3:17-cv-01415](#), in the [U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Texas](#).

--Editing by Gemma Horowitz.

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Case Information

Case Title

[United States of America et al v. Puri et al](#)

Case Number

[3:17-cv-01415](#)

Court

Texas Northern

Nature of Suit

Qui Tam (31 U.S.C. § 3729(a))

Judge

[Ada Brown](#)

Date Filed

May 30, 2017

Law Firms

- [Baum Hedlund](#)

Government Agencies

- [U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Texas](#)
- [U.S. Department of Justice](#)
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