



## Defrauded NHS trust is paid back £1.2m under POCA

**Date: 04/04/2019**

**A payment of £1.2 million has been received by Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, as a result of a Proceeds of Crime compensation order and collaboration between agencies to tackle fraud.**

Substantial payments have also been awarded by the courts to other NHS trusts who fell victim to the same organised crime group: North Essex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust has received £298,219.79 and Tees, Esk & Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust has received £216,584.76.

The original fraud and money laundering investigation, Operation Tarlac, was led by Lincolnshire Police Economic Crime Unit (ECU), closely assisted by the national NHS counter fraud service and its Forensic Computing Unit, all now part of the NHS Counter Fraud Authority. The Forensic Computing Unit's specialist software allowed over 90,000 documents and files to be analysed rapidly and remotely.

Operation Tarlac revealed that a criminal group defrauded £12 million from various public bodies including a number of NHS bodies, councils and housing associations around the UK. The Guernsey government was also targeted, losing £2.6 million. The fraudsters employed forged letters, emails and faxes to masquerade as a legitimate firm and divert payments to themselves.

The investigation resulted in over 50 years of prison sentences in total. The 14th member of the crime group to be convicted, Bayo Awonorin, was sentenced in January this year to nine years and six months' imprisonment, after pleading guilty to conspiracy to defraud and conspiracy to launder money. He had fled the UK whilst on bail but was tracked down in the US by Lincolnshire Police and extradited.

Another conspirator was sentenced to three-and-a-half-years imprisonment in January 2018, after being detained in Germany on a European Arrest Warrant. Oil and gas executive Walter Wagbatsoma was identified by Lincolnshire Police ECU and extradited to the UK.

The international nature of the case went further: funds were laundered through business accounts in the UK, Dubai, Turkey and Poland and some of those funds were later moved back to the UK.

One of the conspirators, Oluwatoyin Allison, remains wanted. He was convicted in his absence in April 2017 and jailed for seven years.

Operation Tarlac began back in September 2011, with a complaint of fraud from Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust. A payment to a building firm of £1.28 million towards a new mental health rehabilitation unit had gone missing. A further 20 linked offences and total losses of £12.6 million suffered by various parties were identified. In sentencing, Judge Philip Head, described it as a “sophisticated and widespread fraud in its conception and execution” with the loss falling on the tax payer.

**Sue Frith, Interim CEO of the NHS Counter Fraud Authority, said today:**

“I commend the excellent work by Lincolnshire Police. Close collaboration between the NHSCFA, police forces and other authorities is vital to root out NHS fraud, especially by professional criminals. These recoveries for the NHS, and the original investigation, are good examples of how NHS counter fraud work helps to curb crimes against the taxpayer even beyond the NHS. Our Forensic Computing Unit, intelligence, fraud investigation and financial investigation specialists all played important roles in Operation Tarlac.”

**Det Sgt Mike Billam, of Lincolnshire Police ECU, said today:**

“Recovering the stolen funds has always been a key objective in this investigation and so I am particularly pleased that LPFT has now received the full value of their loss which I know will be used to benefit our communities. The NHS forensic computing unit provided exceptional and invaluable support to this investigation, managing data and saving costs – an outstanding example of partnership working. The Economic Crime team at Lincolnshire Police have worked relentlessly since the defendants were convicted to recover the value of the frauds from those responsible through the Proceeds of Crime Act. This work is ongoing and it is hoped that further funds will be recovered.”

More than 50 computer devices and 200 mobile phones were seized by police during Tarlac. NHSCFA’s Forensic Computing Unit is equipped with the latest technology, which allows terabytes of data to be forensically imaged and processed rapidly. FCU can provide a secure remote data review service, allowing data to be presented to multiple investigators regardless of their physical location.

**If you suspect that anyone is committing fraud or another economic crime against the NHS, tell NHSCFA about it – you can call our 24-hour, confidential reporting line 0800 028 40 60 or visit our main website to report online: [www.cfa.nhs.uk](http://www.cfa.nhs.uk)**

**“NHS fraud. Spot it, report it, together we stop it”**

**For more information contact the NHSCFA press office on 020 7895 4519/4524**

## Notes to Editors

1. The NHS trusts targeted by the crime group were:

Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust

Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust

North Essex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust

Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust

North and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust ignored the fraudulent request

Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust ignored the fraudulent request

Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust ignored the fraudulent request

2. For more details visit the website [www.cfa.nhs.uk](http://www.cfa.nhs.uk)
3. NHS Counter Fraud Authority is a Special Health Authority established under the NHS Act 2006 as amended.
4. When NHSCFA uses the term 'fraud', we refer to a range of economic crimes, such as fraud, bribery, corruption or any other illegal acts committed by an individual or group of individuals to obtain a financial or professional gain.
5. NHSCFA will also support the work of the NHS Counter Fraud Service (Wales)
6. NHSCFA will work closely with NHS Local Counter Fraud Specialists across the NHS in England to ensure that healthcare crime is tackled and a culture of fraud prevention and deterrence is in place.
7. There are some 300 professionally trained and accredited Local Counter Fraud Specialists in place within health bodies across England and Wales.