



News Release: Managers jailed for £822,000 NHS fraud using U2 names

Sentenced to a combined total of 14 years' imprisonment following investigation by NHS Counter Fraud Service Wales (NHS CFS Wales)

Date: 02/11/2018

Three NHS managers (one in-house and two from an agency) were sentenced today for defrauding Powys Teaching Health Board (PTHB) of £822,236.22 (Merthyr Tydfil Crown Court, 2 November 2018).

Mark Evill was sentenced to 7 years' imprisonment, Robert Howells to 4 years, and Michael Cope to 3 years.

Mark Evill (47, of Shirenewton, Chepstow) organised the fraud. He was assisted by Robert Howells (65, of Sudbury, Chepstow) and Michael Cope (43, of Garden City, Merthyr Tydfil). Evill and Howells were both employed through Resourcing Group Agency as project managers for the health board's Estates department, while Cope was employed directly by the board as a Senior Estate Manager.

The investigation revealed that Evill and Howells knew each other prior to joining the agency and PTHB. An anonymous allegation was received via the NHS Fraud & Corruption Reporting Line, which stated that Evill and Howells had misappropriated NHS money by receiving "pay-offs" from external contractors.

Evill's responsibilities included sourcing external contractors, approving tenders and quotes, authorising payments of invoices and verifying work completed. A water supplies and electrical supply project was allocated £342,000 by PTHB, and Evill directed that a specific contractor named George Morgan Ltd be used.

An investigation conducted by NHS CFS Wales confirmed that George Morgan Ltd was actually set up and run by Evill, with the intention of paying himself for the work he was supposed to be contracting out on behalf of PTHB.

Under the guise of George Morgan Ltd, Evill invoiced the health board using false names "Paul Hewson" and "David Evans", making over £822,000. Paul Hewson and David Evans are better known as Bono and The Edge from the rock band U2.

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The investigation established that Evill spent approximately £300,000 of the defrauded monies on a number of properties in and around Aberdare, South Wales and went on luxury holidays which included flying business class to Dubai. He also bought expensive watches and motor vehicles.

Howells knew from the outset of Evill's connection to George Morgan Ltd, with Cope finding out some time later. Both became complicit in the fraud by accepting bribes from Evill, who gave them envelopes containing cash or cheques which he posted to their home addresses. The work that was actually carried out was done to a very poor standard, so the health board subsequently had to pay to correct it.

The three appeared at Merthyr Tydfil Crown Court in April this year, where they all pleaded not guilty. On 11 October 2018, Evill and Howells changed their pleas to guilty, whilst Cope maintained his not guilty plea. Cope was found guilty by the Jury on 25 October 2018.

The Judge commended lead investigator Cheryl Hill, Deputy Manager of NHS CFS Wales, noting that her investigation and case preparation had greatly assisted the judicial process.

Efforts will now be made to recover the money.

Cheryl Hill, Deputy Manager of NHS Counter Fraud Service Wales, said today:

"Defrauding NHS Wales in any capacity is totally unacceptable. Evill, Howells and Cope were all entrusted to ensure that the money spent by Powys Teaching Health Board was to be used to benefit NHS patients; instead they decided to line their own pockets with NHS money via a well-planned and deliberate deception. The sentences at Court today send out a strong deterrent message to anyone who tries to defraud NHS Wales. All referrals will be professionally investigated by CFS Wales and appropriate criminal, civil and disciplinary action will be pursued. CFS Wales will now focus on recovering the proceeds of the fraud for Powys Teaching Health Board from the defendants by using our powers under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002".

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

"Today's result reflects the ways in which justice will be sought against anyone who chooses to take money from the public sector. I commend the great work of our counterparts at the counter fraud service in Wales. The successful conviction is another win for the NHS and a big deterrent to those who dare to abuse it."

Juliette Simms, Specialist Prosecutor for CPS, said today:

"Mark Evill took hundreds of thousands of pounds from this public body out of greed, fixing it with colleagues to ensure his business received lucrative contracts for work. He enjoyed a luxury lifestyle with the NHS money he defrauded. His partners in crime originally claimed they did not know about Evill's involvement with the company but the CPS proved Howells was complicit in the fraud and Evill had bought him a Ford Focus worth almost £11,000 for his efforts."

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Carol Shillabeer, Chief Executive of Powys Teaching Health Board, said today:

“The people of Powys have been badly let down by the criminal actions of these individuals. I would like to thank NHS Counter Fraud Service Wales for their support which has helped to bring this successful prosecution, and also for the steps they will now be taking to support the NHS to recover the proceeds of this fraud.”

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

“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. For more details visit the website www.cfa.nhs.uk
2. NHS Counter Fraud Authority is a Special Health Authority established under the NHS Act 2006 as amended.
3. 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.
4. NHSCFA will also support the work of the NHS Counter Fraud Service (Wales)
5. 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.
6. There are some 300 professionally trained and accredited Local Counter Fraud Specialists in place within health bodies across England and Wales.