

*CBS Evening News with Tony Dokoupil*

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[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Hospice Fraud?]

TONY DOKOUPIL: Turning now to a CBS News investigation about Medicare fraud involving both identity theft and fake hospice care. It's an area long rife with fraud, costing taxpayers millions, and it may be getting worse. CBS News correspondent Adam Yamaguchi has details.

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: CBS News Investigates Suspected Medicare Fraud in California]

ADAM YAMAGUCHI: Sixty-nine-year-old Dr. Lynn Ianni was, according to Medicare records, dying in hospice care two years ago, something she discovered when she sought physical therapy for a pickleball injury.

DR. LYNN IANNI: And I said, what? What are you talking about?

YAMAGUCHI: Ianni's Medicare number had been stolen and used by a company to enroll her in hospice care, which she obviously didn't need.

IANNI: And just to think you're literally without coverage because of some ridiculous fraudulent thing.

YAMAGUCHI: A CBS News investigation found an industry ripe for fraud, especially in California, companies accused of overbilling, real patients denied care, and it's costing hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars. When we called the hospice that fraudulently enrolled Ianni, no one answered.

AUTOMATED VOICE: Cannot accept any messages at this time.

YAMAGUCHI: CBS News analyzed every hospice licensed in L.A. County, more than 1,700, and checked for the same warning signs the state used in an audit of the industry, like multiple hospices packed into one building, or caregivers whose patients, supposedly at death's door, are discharged alive.

SHEILA CLARK: You can't throw a rock without hitting a hospice.

YAMAGUCHI: We brought our findings to Sheila Clark, a hospice patient advocate, showing her the more than 700 agencies CBS found with multiple signs of potential fraud. There's one hospice here that hits all six of California's red flags of possible fraud.

SHEILA CLARK: Well, there's no hospice there.

YAMAGUCHI: Clark tells us, when offices like these close abruptly, it's real patients in desperate need who pay the price. [TO CLARK] How does that make you feel?

CLARK: Sad, really sad, because I talk to them every day.

YAMAGUCHI: California Attorney General Rob Bonta is responsible for investigating the industry in the state. [TO BONTA] I wonder how they can go for a full year and still not have their license revoked. Is that a systemic failure?

CALIFORNIA ATTORNEY GENERAL ROB BONTA (D): We need to be responsive to the red flags and react to them, not just count them, but do something, take action.

YAMAGUCHI: The attorney general's office says it's charged more than 100 defendants. Now, Medicare's federally administered, and the state licenses hospices to be able to operate. California has also extended a moratorium on new hospice licenses through next year, Tony.

DOKOUPIL: Adam, thank you very much.