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Cops bust clandestine dental lab

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- Discussion

Joe Pyrah - Daily Herald | Posted: Friday, October 9, 2009 12:45 am | 1 Comment

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AMERICAN FORK -- Cops took a bite out of crime Wednesday after busting a decade-old illegal dentistry operation in American Fork, and it appears the bust was part of a larger operation.

After getting a warrant, UHP troopers found a dentist chair and "several remnants of dental work" in the home of Raul Garay, including blood stains, rusty instruments and "real teeth," according to court documents.

The documents state that Garay has never had a license to do dental work in Utah. A person identifying himself as Garay's son answered the phone at the residence on Thursday and said his father had been a dentist in his native El Salvador.

Troopers say that Garay waived his Miranda rights and told them that he had been operating the Hispanic patients-only setup for more than 10 years. He would see about half a dozen patients a week and did such work as check-ups, extractions, fillings and crowns. There was X-ray equipment and the lead-lined bibs commonly used for X-rays in the home. It was a cash-only operation (including a patient who paid \$150 the day Garay was arrested) though records were kept that included names and work performed.

Garay told troopers that he would get the necessary drugs from a friend in El Salvador and that he would occasionally give patients 800 mg ibuprofen pills that came from a prescription his wife had. Garay was arrested on 25 felony counts of practicing dentistry without a license.

When asked for additional information, troopers referred all questions to the state Attorney General's Office. Spokesman Paul Murphy said he had no additional details but that the bust was "part of a bigger operation."

Despite massive shortfalls in the state budget, the Attorney General's Office was given \$1 million earlier this year to create a strike force that would focus on felonies committed by or against undocumented immigrants. Murphy would not confirm whether the strike force was part of the American Fork incident.

The low-income or undocumented population could be seeking out people like Garay because of a lack of alternatives, said one Utah health expert.

Utah was recently ranked poorly in basic health care availability for its low-income residents, according to the State Scorecard on Health System Performance put out by the Commonwealth Fund. For example, there is only one dentist in all of Utah County who will see children with Medicaid, said Jessica Kendrick with the Utah Health Policy Project.

"It would be even worse among an undocumented population," Kendrick said. "It wouldn't surprise me that people are seeking out care in other ways."

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