



Walgreens Gets a Bitter Prescription

By Stony Olsen

Walgreens is one of the largest pharmacies in the United States, operating more than 5,000 retail pharmacies throughout the nation. As such, it is good for lots of prescriptions, and it deals with many insurance programs.



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One of its biggest programs is with Medicaid. Walgreens dispenses drugs and bills Medicaid for them. And apparently Walgreens, along with a couple of other pharmacies, has been monkeying with Medicaid.

The Department of Justice took a dim view of this for some odd reason and investigated the pharmacy. Walgreens has decided to pay more than \$35 million to settle the drug-fraud accusations.

What happened was that Walgreens switched patients to different versions of the same drugs (Ranitidine, Fluoxetine, and Eldepryl) to increase its payments from Medicaid. In each case it would switch from a less expensive tablet or capsule to the more expensive capsule or tablet. Then it would bill Medicaid for the more expensive pills, while the patients saw absolutely no benefit.

Not only is Walgreens coughing up some serious cash, it also got itself on the government's watch list — now the feds are going to monitor the pharmacy for the next five years to make sure this doesn't happen again.

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