

Medical Hoax Hits 200,000 Poor New Yorkers

WASHINGTON—At the Chiropractic Center of New York near Times Square, telephone solicitors—some posing as doctors—worked a battery of 35 telephones to drum up business. They used prepared scripts. One fruitful approach: "We have visiting us a professor from Germany who specializes in your condition..."

If a prospect did not make an appointment on the first try he would be called repeatedly.

THERE WERE COME-ONS A promise of free consultation. A promise of free treatment.

There were claims that the operation was part of Medicare, or was sponsored by the government of trade unions.

And from Spanish Harlem, from Bedford-Stuyvesant and from other neighborhoods of poverty and helplessness new patients poured into the offices

at 128 W. 42nd St.—an estimated 20,000 of them in each year since 1962.

Once inside the doors, they were parceled out among perhaps 10 chiropractors and processed at a rate as high as 20 per doctor per hour.

They were told that X-rays

were essential—but often were not told that the X-ray would be \$50 or more.

Then came a warning that certain treatments must be taken. Without them, terrible results—even death within a week—would follow.

FINALLY, the patients—even some unable to read—were asked to sign treatment contracts.

For patients who failed to pay there were phone calls at work as well as at home. Bills were mailed with compelling printed messages enclosed.

One message was headlined, "My attorney is suing you. He has a contract signed by you."

"God can do anything." A second message began, "Pray and God will give you money to pay your overdue bills."

This one was signed by Dr. Bernard Zovluc, "Your dedi-

cated doctor." In his text he said, "God has chosen me, in his mysterious way, to help you get well."

THIS PATTERN OF OPERATION was outlined in indictments, in the testimony of victims and defendants at a recent trial in federal court in Manhattan and in a pre-sentencing affidavit filed in the court by assistant U.S. attorney Richard A. Givens.

The defendants were Zovluc, his sister, Anne Friedman, and Alvin Eisenstein. Early last summer they were indicted, principally for mail fraud.

From the Chiropractic Center the law seized 31 phones. The defendants then obtained 40 new phones under the name of Lewis Advertising. Mrs. Friedman testified that the names in the application to the phone company—"John Lewis" and "Conrad Morgan"—were aliases for her brother. This manipulation led to another indictment last June.

Last Feb. 7, the case went to trial in the court of Judge Harold R. Tyler. On March 4 a jury returned verdicts of guilty. Appeals are expected.

EACH DEFENDANT was convicted of one count of conspiracy, eight counts of mail fraud and one count of false use of initials ("U.S.") (delinquent patients were asked to make payments to the U.S. Credit Rating and Reporting Agency.)

The maximum possible prison sentences are five years on the conspiracy charge and on each of the eight fraud counts, plus one year on the false-use charge.

ONE ELEMENT in the scheme, Prosecutor Givens said, was a deliberate exploitation of a "susceptibility to fraud" in Negroes, Puerto Ricans and others who had been too disadvantaged to know how to protect themselves.

Another element cited in Givens' affidavit was "abuse of power" and "abuse of the forms of legal processes."

And, he said, there was "probable injury to the health of many victims because they did not seek more individualized help elsewhere."

The affidavit designated Zovluc "the principal architect" of the enterprise. He is a 29-year-old licensed chiropractor who was graduated from the Chiropractic Institute of New York.

In 1965, as a guest on the Johnny Carson "Tonight" show, Zovluc was presented to a national television audience as an advocate of monodieting—eating only one food at each meal or maybe even each day. The monodiet Zovluc said he was on at the time was dandelion grass.

Eisenstein, 32, was graduated from the Atlantic States (now Columbia) School of Chiropractic, but his state license was revoked last January.

Two years ago, Zovluc attracted additional publicity by advertising in racing publication for "hams or sore horses." Using chiropractic methods, he told The New York Post, he would rejuvenate the horses and enter them in the Kentucky Derby, the Freshness and other classics.

Eisenstein was named in the prosecutor's affidavit as the "enforcement officer." He punched Joseph Cuffey, a federal marshal, who came to the Chiropractic Center to arrest Zovluc. Later, Eisenstein was convicted of assault. He will be sentenced on this separate charge, and could get up to three years.

Mrs. Friedman, about 35, was described in Givens' affidavit as the "administrative arm" of the enterprise. Her particular responsibility was collection methods.

THE PROSECUTOR said the Chiropractic Center's "traditional" operations were breaching in scope. Among the details set out in his affidavit from the trial and from an investigation by postal inspectors:

The Center's principal expenses (an indicated \$200,000 in 1965) were for phone soliciting and advertising. The standard fee for a treatment was first \$5 and then \$6.

Some chiropractors who had worked for Zovluc testified that the X-rays for which patients were charged \$50 or more were not actually used for diagnoses. They were "told to use 'any X-ray' if the correct one was not found," they said.

Patients testified they saw some X-rays which purportedly were theirs—but which had dried within the unlikely time of five minutes.

Sometimes Zovluc, and his colleagues sent employers what appeared to be—but were not—legal notices of garnishment of wages, sometimes the debtors were sued.

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