

Former paramedic supervisor is sentenced to nine years for stealing, tampering with narcotic supplies

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ST. LOUIS - On August 21, 2018, Jason Laut, 41, a resident of O'Fallon, Illinois, and a former paramedic supervisor for MedStar Ambulance Inc., was sentenced to 111 months imprisonment (9 years and 3 months) for stealing and tampering with ambulance narcotic supplies, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Illinois, Steven D. Weinhoeft, announced today. A jury in East St. Louis, Illinois, previously convicted Laut after a two-week trial on all 38 counts of the federal indictment, which charged Laut with wire fraud, falsifying medical records, aggravated identity theft, and tampering with a consumer product. Laut has been detained since his conviction.

Between January 2013 and May 2015, Laut changed, altered, and falsified documents and records to conceal his theft of two federally controlled substances – fentanyl and morphine – out of MedStar ambulances. Laut’s most egregious conduct concerned fentanyl, an incredibly powerful opioid narcotic used to treat severe pain. Narcotics boxes on ambulances contain only two vials of fentanyl because they are typically used on only the most severely injured trauma patients. Laut tampered with the fentanyl vials by removing the fentanyl with a syringe and replacing it with saline or some other solution. By this method, Laut made it appear as though the vials were still full and unopened, making his theft almost impossible to detect. These altered fentanyl vials were then placed back in the narcotics box and returned to ambulances. In 2015, 26 out of 28 vials on Medstar Ambulances were found to have tampered fentanyl vials.

As a result of this case, the procedures for handling narcotics boxes have changed. But before Laut’s crimes were discovered, narcotics boxes were regularly shared among the ambulance companies in the area, which meant that the vials Laut altered were also reintroduced by unsuspecting pharmacists and paramedics onto ambulances owned and operated by companies other than MedStar. During the proceedings, prosecutors presented 82 such vials that were discovered and removed from active duty ambulances throughout the Southwest EMS Region. Investigators were unable to determine definitively whether or to what extent any patients may have received treatment from the altered vials. However, at Laut’s sentencing, a representative of Memorial Hospital informed the court that paramedics in the field had reported occasions when the fentanyl they were administering appeared to be ineffective at relieving pain.

Representatives from both Memorial and Medstar advised the court that the harm caused by the defendant’s crimes was not just the risk that seriously injured patients received saline instead of fentanyl. They also noted that as a result of Laut’s actions, medical directors were forced to remove fentanyl from ambulances for three years because of diversion concerns. One paramedic advised the court at sentencing that, over those three years, he recalled five patients who could not receive morphine because of allergies. Those patients received virtually no pain relief because the fentanyl had been removed.

Using his administrator access for MedStar, Laut altered records, known as patient care reports, to falsely indicate that controlled substances were given to patients when, in fact, they were not. Laut also made false statements on narcotics logs submitted to Memorial Hospital. Narcotics logs are used by paramedics to record the administration of narcotic drugs, including fentanyl and morphine, while treating patients. To cover his tracks, Laut claimed to have given fentanyl and morphine to patients who did not exist or to patients who did not actually receive the drugs. On at least two occasions, Laut

unlawfully used the name of a former doctor at Memorial Hospital on a narcotics log as authorization for administering fentanyl and morphine, when neither was actually administered to the patient.

The theft of the drugs and acts to conceal the theft caused a loss to Memorial Hospital, which was financially responsible for keeping the ambulance narcotics boxes filled.

There is no parole in the federal prison system. After he finishes serving his sentence, Laut will spend three years on supervised release.

The investigation was conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Sparta, Illinois Police Department, the Randolph County Sheriff's Department, and Diversion Investigators of the Drug Enforcement Administration. MedStar Ambulance Inc. in Sparta and Memorial Hospital in Belleville also provided extensive assistance throughout the investigation.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Ranley R. Killian and Michael J. Quinley.