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**Doctor Jailed for Medi-Cal Fraud**

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A doctor who headed a Huntington Park clinic has been sentenced to 16 months in prison and fined $347,000 on 17 felony and misdemeanor charges, including collecting false Medi-Cal claims and aiding employees who practiced medicine without a license.

Dr. Suresh Gandotra, 41, was taken into custody after sentencing last week. Gandotra's wife, Rita, 39, was sentenced to 180 days in County Jail, five years' probation and fined $10,000 on five felony counts of Medi-Cal fraud and grand theft.

An appeal is pending, said lawyer Daryl L. Smith, who represents the Gandotras.

Deputy Atty. Gen. Richard Rojo presented evidence during the trial that indicated the Gandotras defrauded the state of $8,600 by billing Medi-Cal for services provided by unlicensed employees and for services never rendered.

A Superior Court jury in March found Dr. Gandotra guilty of 14 felony counts and three misdemeanor counts ranging from grand theft related to fraudulent Medi-Cal claims, to aiding and abetting the unlawful practice of medicine. Rita Gandotra was found guilty of five felony counts of filing false Medi-Cal claims, conspiracy to cheat the government and grand theft.



Rojo said Dr. Gandotra performed only about 10% of the services that were required to be rendered by a licensed physician. Unlicensed employees--doctors from Mexico who were not licensed to practice in the United States--provided the bulk of the medical services, Rojo said.

Rojo said he did not know how many patients received medical care and prescriptions from unlicensed personnel at Gandotra's Coast Urgent Care Medical Clinic. The clinic's clientele generally is poor and Spanish-speaking. Rojo alleged in a Superior Court trial that the fraudulent billing and unlawful practice of medicine had been going on at least since 1983. He said there was no evidence that clients had been injured.

"Hundreds came in and out," Rojo said. "They were open 24 hours a day."

The case was referred to the attorney general's office after state auditors detected a suspiciously high number of Medi-Cal claims, Rojo said.

The Coast Urgent Care Medical Clinic will continue to operate out of a one-story building on Soto Street near Slauson Avenue, acting administrator James Bartholomew said this week. Gandotra had run the clinic until he was jailed last week. Another doctor has been brought in to treat patients, Bartholomew said.

Gandotra and two clinic employees, Carlos Cuellar and Ricardo Santos, were arrested at the clinic and charged in January, 1989. Rita Gandotra and a billing clerk were charged later.

Cuellar and Santos, who originally were charged with practicing medicine without a license, among other things, each pleaded no contest to two misdemeanor counts of forging prescriptions. Cuellar and Santos, both doctors in Mexico, were given two years' probation, fined $1,500 and ordered to perform 100 hours of community service, Rojo said. The two testified against the Gandotras.

Charges were dropped against the billing clerk.

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