

Official: Mass. lab used models to sell bone tests

December 16 2010

(AP) -- Flirtatious young models at mall kiosks coaxed shoppers to submit to expensive bone marrow tests they were told would cost nothing, New Hampshire's attorney general said Wednesday.

But the lab that hired the models billed \$4,336 for the tests to [insurance companies](#), the city of Manchester, N.H., and some consumers - well above the \$110 other labs charge, Attorney General Michael Delaney said.

The lab, UMass Memorial Health Care in Worcester, Mass., outfitted the models in black high heels, black skirts, white lab coats and wigs and sent them to malls around New England, Delaney said. They were paid \$75 per hour to recruit shoppers to submit to DNA swabs.

The lab could have spent as much as \$4 million on the models over the past 18 months to get donations, Delaney estimated. Delaney said one modeling agency was paid \$40,000 to \$50,000 a week to provide models.

Some recruiters worked on commission and had little regard for the qualifications of prospective donors, senior Assistant Attorney General Jim Boffetti said. He said they took samples from people who didn't qualify because of age or medical issues or who might already be in the national registry.

"They were told they could sign up again," he said.

Delaney said he and the state Insurance Department are investigating whether unfair and deceptive practices were used in violation of state law. He said it was too early to estimate the total amount of money or people involved.

The lab and the Caitlin Raymond International Registry issued a statement saying they are "confident that we will be able to address and satisfy" the concerns of investigators. They agreed to suspend operations in New Hampshire until the investigation is finished. The registry coordinates use of bone marrow and other tissue among donors and doctors.

UMass said potential donors sign a consent form that explains their insurance company may be billed for lab testing, but Delaney said it isn't clear what donors were told.

Once New Hampshire began investigating, UMass dropped its lab charge without explanation to \$1,700, Delaney said. The lab said it charges based on the negotiated rate with insurers.

Manchester Mayor Ted Gatsas brought the issue to the state's attention last week after city employees showed their insurance benefits statements to the city reflecting the high testing cost. The city is self-insured. The registry said it would reverse the charges for city employees, estimated at \$544,000.

Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield in New Hampshire said it is investigating whether its employers and consumers were affected.

Delaney said the scam is specific to the registry.

"There are many, many good, reputable bone marrow registries in New Hampshire and the country," he said.

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Citation: Official: Mass. lab used models to sell bone tests (2010, December 16) retrieved 15 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2010-12-mass-lab-bone.html>

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