

'Stunning' number of large drug doses by doctor, expert says

July 6 2015, by Ed White



Terry Spurlock, right, of Holly, Mich., a former patient of Dr. Farid Fata, speaks with his wife Nikii outside federal court, Monday, July 6, 2015, in Detroit. Patients of Fata received "stunning" doses of a powerful, expensive drug that exposed them to life-threatening infections, an expert testified Monday as a judge heard details about a cancer specialist who fleeced insurance companies and harmed hundreds of people. (AP Photo/Paul Sancya)

Patients of a Detroit-area doctor received "stunning" doses of a

powerful, expensive drug that exposed them to life-threatening infections, an expert testified Monday as a judge heard details about a cancer specialist who fleeced insurance companies and harmed hundreds of people.

Dr. Farid Fata is headed to prison for fraud and other crimes. But U.S. District Judge Paul Borman first is hearing from experts and former patients about the extent of his scheme to reap millions of dollars from Medicare and other health programs.

Nearly three dozen ex-patients and family members, many dressed in black, chartered a bus to attend the hearing, which could last days. Some will testify Tuesday.

"This is a small fraction of the people this guy has hurt," said Terry Spurlock, 52, of Holly, who had three more years of treatments after a tumor on his neck disappeared. "He gave me so much treatment, it stopped my immune system."

Fata, 50, pleaded guilty last fall to fraud, money laundering and conspiracy. The government is seeking a 175-year prison sentence, while the Oakland County man is asking for no more than 25 years.

The government said 553 people have been identified as victims, along with four insurance companies. There were more than 9,000 unnecessary infusions or injections.

"There is an aggressive approach to treating cancer. This was beyond. This was over the top," said Dr. Dan Longo, a Harvard medical professor and deputy editor at the *New England Journal of Medicine*, who testified Monday as a \$400-an-hour expert for prosecutors after examining 25 patient files, a tiny portion of Fata's practice.



Ellen Piligian speaks about her father, a former patient of Dr. Farid Fata, outside federal court, Monday, July 6, 2015, in Detroit. Patients of Fata received "stunning" doses of a powerful, expensive drug that exposed them to life-threatening infections, an expert testified Monday as a judge heard details about a cancer specialist who fleeced insurance companies and harmed hundreds of people. (AP Photo/Paul Sancya)

Longo was asked about patients who were given a drug called Rituximab, which can weaken the immune system if overused. It's typically given eight times for aggressive lymphoma, but one patient got it 94 times. Another got it 76 times.

"It's a stunning number of injections of that drug. ... That creates a susceptibility to infectious agents of various sorts," Longo said.

Later, he told the judge that "all the files I looked at had problems, but I would not say all the treatment was inappropriate."

It was the first time that many former patients had seen Fata in months, if not years. He has been in custody since his 2013 arrest. He wore a white dress shirt and dark suit in court.



Liz Lupo, second from left, shows a sign in honor of her mother, Marianne Lupo, a former patient of Dr. Farid Fata, outside federal court, Monday, July 6, 2015, in Detroit. Patients of Fata received "stunning" doses of a powerful, expensive drug that exposed them to life-threatening infections, an expert testified Monday as a judge heard details about a cancer specialist who fleeced insurance companies and harmed hundreds of people. (AP Photo/Paul Sancya)

"I wanted to knock that smirk off his face," said Geraldine Parkin, 54, of Davison, who organized the \$35-a-person charter bus.

She said her husband, Tim, has survived non-Hodgkin lymphoma but has other chronic problems because of excessive treatments.

"He has a lot of anger," Parkin said.

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