

ADHD patients could face disrupted access to meds following fraud case

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The two top officers of a telehealth company that began to distribute ADHD drugs widely during the pandemic have been charged with health care fraud, the U.S. Department of Justice announced Thursday.

The arrests will likely worsen ongoing shortages of Adderall and another ADHD medications, Vyvanse, experts said.

"There are a lot of people who are going to be struggling without consistent medication," Margaret Sibley, an associate professor of psychiatry and [behavioral sciences](#) at the University of Washington School of Medicine in Seattle, told the New York Times.

In [announcing the charges](#), the Justice Department said the chief executive and the clinical president of the California-based telehealth company Done Global Inc. are accused of participating in a scheme to distribute Adderall and other stimulants for ADHD to patients who did not need the medications, and to bill insurers for these drugs.

"These defendants exploited the COVID-19 pandemic to develop and carry out a \$100 million scheme to defraud taxpayers and provide easy access to Adderall and other stimulants for no legitimate medical purpose," Attorney General Merrick Garland said in a news release.

Done was one of several telehealth companies that became popular during pandemic lockdowns in 2020, when the government relaxed restrictions for online prescriptions for controlled substances such as Adderall, the Times reported.

In its [indictment](#), the Justice Department claimed that Ruthia He, Done's chief executive, and David Brody, the company's clinical president, spent tens of millions on "deceptive advertisements" posted on [social media platforms](#) such as Facebook and TikTok.

"As alleged in the indictment, the defendants provided easy access to Adderall and other stimulants by exploiting telemedicine and spending millions on deceptive advertisements on social media. They generated over \$100 million in revenue by arranging for the prescription of over 40

million pills," Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Nicole Argentieri, head of the Justice Department's Criminal Division, said in a news release.

"These charges are the Justice Department's first criminal drug distribution prosecutions related to telemedicine prescribing through a digital health company," Argentieri added. "As these charges make clear, corporate executives who put profit over the health and safety of patients—including by using technological innovation—will be held to account."

The company did not respond to the Times request for comment.

With Done clients, prospective patients took a minute-long assessment to evaluate if they should be treated for ADHD. The company connected patients virtually with clinicians who could then diagnose them and prescribe ADHD medication. In some states, patients were able to see providers in person or get medications delivered directly to them, the Times reported.

"It's marketing a short quiz in exchange for a diagnosis or a stimulant prescription," Olivia Little, a senior investigative researcher at the nonprofit organization Media Matters for America, explained to the Times. Done had 160 ads active across Facebook and Instagram as of Thursday evening, she noted.

Federal officials also claimed the company limited the information available to Done's prescribers and told providers to prescribe stimulants to patients who did not qualify. The providers were also required to keep initial patient consultations to under 30 minutes.

That approach seemed to promote "as many prescriptions as possible and as many diagnoses as possible, rather than making it about the patient,"

Dr. Nicole Hadeed, a clinical assistant professor at Michigan Medicine, told the Times.

For ADHD patients struggling to get medicine during the ongoing shortage, the CDC recommended in its own [health advisory](#) issued Thursday that patients who are running low on their prescriptions see their health care provider as soon as possible. Some patients can experience withdrawal if they stop taking medication suddenly, the agency warned.

"A disruption involving this large telehealth company could impact as many as 30,000 to 50,000 [patients](#) ages 18 years and older across all 50 U.S. states," the CDC noted in the advisory.

The CDC also warned that getting stimulants through illegal channels raises the risk that the pills may be counterfeit or contain fentanyl.

More information: The FDA has more on the [Adderall shortage](#).

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