



FRAUDSTERS IN THE HEALTH-CARE SECTOR

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Introduction

The National Crime Agency website states that fraud is the most commonly experienced crime in the UK, affecting UK society economically and socially. It accounts for over 40% of crime in England and Wales. According to the Office of National Statistics, it was the most common crime type between April 2022-March 2023, with an estimated 3.5 million incidents of fraud experienced by adults aged 16 and over.

The NHS Counter Fraud Authority (NHSCFA) estimates that the NHS is vulnerable to over £1.2 billion worth of fraud each year. Everyone has a part to play in fighting fraud. Being aware of the risk and remaining vigilant are important first steps, followed by knowing how to report fraud. This latest edition of Fraud Stop covers healthcare staff who have been prosecuted for fraud, fraud prevention advice and news on other targeted action being taken to prevent fraud in the UK.



CASE STUDY:

Former GP Practice Manager sentenced for fraud

The NHSCFA reported on 8 March 2024 that a former GP practice manager had been sentenced to three years at Swansea Crown Court for stealing £324,000 from the practice for her own personal gain. She had earlier pleaded guilty to one offence of fraud by abuse of position in December.

The fraudster had been employed at the GP Surgery since 2009 and in her role, she had sole responsibility for the day-to-day financial operations of the practice including payroll and paying locums and suppliers.

At the time of her suspension in 2022 her salary was approximately £45,000 per annum. The fraud was discovered when some financial documents were found in the surgery which showed that a recent payment had been made to a locum doctor who had not worked at the surgery for a number of years.

One of the senior partners at the practice referred the matter to South Wales Police in March 2022 who passed it to NHS Counter Fraud Wales for investigation. As part of the investigation, a financial investigator conducted analysis of the fraudster's bank account and determined that the stolen money had been transferred into her bank account and spent.

NHS Counter Fraud Wales will use their powers under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 to recover the money and return it to the victims.



CASE STUDY:

A second practice manager jailed for a £69K fraud following input from TIAA Counter Fraud Specialists

A man who stole more than £69,000 from the GP surgery he managed has been jailed for three years. The fraudster began making unauthorised payments from his employer's account in May 2022. He had full access to the surgery's bank accounts on the Barclays online portal, had his own PIN for access, along with his own card and card reader. He was also responsible for making his own salary payments using the practice bank account.

Between May 2022 and February 2023, the fraudster made five unauthorised salary payments to himself, totalling £25,159, which were in addition to his salary.

He also set up a bank account in the name of NS Medical. Using this account between March 2022 and March 2023, he paid the Locum Superintendent Pharmacist at the surgery her legitimate invoices, whilst forging new invoices under the pharmacist's name and charging the surgery inflated fees. He then kept the difference in the value of the invoices for his own benefit. This was done on fourteen occasions to the total of £44,182.

The fraudster's contract at the surgery was terminated in March 2023 on grounds of gross misconduct. He was jailed at Aylesbury Crown Court on 28 March 2024 after pleading guilty to two counts of fraud by false representation at a previous hearing in January.



CASE STUDY:

Paramedic prosecuted for theft of medical devices

A TIAA investigator worked with the police to bring a paramedic to justice. The paramedic who had extensive service in the NHS, stole medical equipment from Trust ambulances, including an ECG machine. These items were then either used to equip the private ambulance which he ran for events or sold via eBay for financial gain.

The paramedic was arrested, and his property searched by police officers, during which multiple items were recovered which were later confirmed as NHS Trust property. He did make a full admission to the theft charge and on 19 March 2024 was sentenced to two years imprisonment, suspended for two years, 200 hours of unpaid work, 14 days rehabilitation activity and £3,000 compensation to be paid to the NHS within one year.

CASE STUDY:

Hospital consultant sentenced after forging timesheets

On 10 January 2024, the NHSCFA reported that a hospital consultant and high-profile social media influencer had been sentenced at Kingston Crown Court to 24 months suspended thanks to the work of NHS counter fraud professionals.

The consultant pleaded guilty in December to defrauding the NHS of more than £50K by submitting false timesheets during his time as a locum at an NHS Foundation Trust.

Local Counter Fraud Specialists and the NHS Counter Fraud Authority Fraud Hub worked together to fully uncover the extent of the fraudster's offending following an audit at the Trust identifying discrepancies within records presented. After extensive investigations revealed the full scale of the dishonesty, a file was presented to the Crown Prosecution Service, who agreed that the evidence available warranted a charge of making a false instrument with the intent for it to be accepted as genuine under the Forgery and Counterfeiting Act 1981.

The consultant was recruited as a locum consultant to help with the post-covid backlog within the Trust. He almost immediately asked to reduce his hours to part-time working. However, for six months, he submitted twenty-nine forged timesheets to his agency purporting that he was working full time and was paid accordingly. Some timesheets were altered after a genuine authorising signature had been provided, but others he just made up himself and forged or copied signatures.

CASE STUDY:

Administrator convicted of prescription fraud following a TIAA investigation

A GP surgery administrator was convicted on 11 April 2024 following a guilty plea to fraud by false representation and sentenced to 150 hours of unpaid work, to complete 25 days of rehabilitation activity and ordered to pay £5,344 in compensation to the NHS.

Between February 2020 and June 2023, the fraudster accessed patient records without authorisation to create drug entries for Tramadol, print a prescription and then cancel the records using both her own username and other staff members. She then collected the Tramadol from various pharmacies to support an addiction to the strong pain killer. In total she fraudulently created 232 prescriptions to obtain 22,252 tablets of Tramadol.

TIAA's Investigations Manager Andrew Ede said "She abused her position to access medical records to create prescriptions for Tramadol to feed an addiction. After printing the prescription, she attempted to cancel and delete the drug entry in an attempt to hide what she had done. However, audit trails existed to identify the full scale of offending. It was only thanks to a vigilant pharmacist who recognised her as working at the GP Practice on presentation of a prescription for another person and alerted the local counter fraud team. The Court recognised that fraud investigated by a network of Counter Fraud Specialists operating in the NHS are mostly funded by the local NHS provider and as such awarded compensation to cover part of the investigation cost."

Government backed national campaign to fight fraud launched in February 2024

A major campaign to transform the fight against fraudsters launched on 12 February 2024 and is a significant milestone in the Home Office's delivery of the Fraud Strategy published in May 2023.

Stop! Think Fraud is backed by leading counter fraud experts who are uniting under one voice to provide consistent, clear and robust anti-fraud advice to the public.

The campaign has far reaching support among the tech, financial and retail sectors, as well as law enforcement, victim care agencies and consumer groups. Supporting agencies have pledged to prominently display the Stop! Think Fraud advice and share it among their stakeholders.

It has been created to empower a mass audience, with a new website providing vital guidance on how to spot fraud, staying safe and what to do if you are targeted. The web address is www.gov.uk/stopthinkfraud

Project Athena – a new way of tackling fraud in the NHS

An innovative project to find fraud and prevent losses to the NHS through the way data is collected has been launched by the NHSCFA. Project Athena is a new pilot project aiming to both prevent fraud and deliver a dedicated response by identifying patterns in data on a scale that has never been done before across the NHS for counter fraud purposes. It will give the NHSCFA the expertise to focus on key areas using data analytics.

This will mean that more fraud can not only be detected, but also prevented. Data analytics is already used across the NHS and is growing in importance in a wide range of areas, from health innovation and clinical decision making, through to patient access. Project Athena will be using data analytics, combined with the practical expertise and knowledge of the NHSCFA, to reduce potential fraud losses to the NHS by ensuring that funding goes to where it is intended - patient care.

A dedicated team is now being set up to lead the development of Project Athena, which has received the backing of the Department of Health and Social Care. A key focus of the team's work will be prevention by finding patterns in data which are indicators of fraud.



Are you scam-savvy?

Take Five is a national campaign that offers straightforward and impartial advice to help everyone protect themselves from financial fraud. This includes email deception and phone-based scams as well as online fraud – particularly where criminals impersonate trusted organisations.

Test your ability to spot a scam via the Take Five quick quiz: <https://quiz.takefive-stopfraud.org.uk/>

Take Five advice is to:



Action Fraud advise being alert to ticket fraud ahead of big events

Action Fraud, the national fraud and cybercrime reporting service, has just launched a ticket fraud awareness campaign, warning people to be alert to fraudsters trying to catch out people planning for popular and sold-out events.

Festival and concert goers looking to get last minute tickets to this summer’s top events are urged to be on their guard against fraudulent sellers, as new data reveals £6.7 million was lost to ticket fraud last year. Last year more than 8,700 people reported they had been a victim ticket fraud, with a total of £6.7 million lost. This works out to an average loss of £772 per victim. (Action Fraud, 16/04/24).

Action Fraud’s advice is to:

Only buy tickets from the venue’s box office, the promoter, an official agent or a well-known and reputable ticket exchange site.

Avoid paying for tickets by bank transfer, especially if buying from someone unknown. Paying by credit card or payment services such as PayPal give you a better chance of recovering the money if you become a victim of fraud.

Be wary of unsolicited emails, texts or adverts offering unbelievably good deals on tickets.

Is the vendor a member of Society of Ticket Agents and Retailers (STAR)? If they are, the company has signed up to their strict governing standards. STAR also offers an approved Alternative Dispute Resolution service to help customers with outstanding complaints. For more information visit <https://www.star.org.uk/>

Disclaimer:

The content of this document is intended to give general information only. Its contents should not, therefore, be regarded as constituting specific advice, and should not be relied on as such. No specific action should be taken without seeking appropriate professional advice.

If you suspect any fraud, bribery or corruption against a healthcare organisation, contact your Anti-Crime Specialist.

→ **Melanie Alflatt**, Director - Operations (Anti Crime & IT Audit)

Email: melanie.alflatt@tiaa.co.uk or fraud@tiaa.co.uk

→ **Alternatively**, call the 24-hour reporting line on **0800 028 4060** or use the online reporting form: [Report NHS fraud | Help fight fraud within the NHS | Report your fraud concerns and suspicions using a confidential online form \(cfa.nhs.uk\)](#). All reports are treated in confidence and you have the option to remain anonymous.