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## HOUSTON MAN SENTENCED FOR HEALTH CARE FRAUD

*More than \$600,000 stolen from Medicare based on false claims*

**SHREVEPORT, La:** United States Attorney Stephanie A. Finley announced today that Godspower Joseph Essang, 35, of Houston, Texas, was sentenced today, to 37 months in federal prison with three years supervised release for Medicare fraud.

Essang was also ordered to pay \$613,096 in restitution to Medicare. Judge Maurice S. Hicks immediately remanded Essang into the custody of the U. S. Marshal's Service to begin serving his sentence.

Essang was sentenced based on his Sept. 28, 2012, guilty plea to one count of health care fraud. During the guilty plea hearing, Essang admitted owning and operating Shalom Equipment, a durable medical equipment company, located on Woodward Avenue in Shreveport. Shalom engaged in the business of providing what were referred to as "ortho kits," which were braces for various parts of the body. Essang admitted paying individuals to provide him with their Medicare beneficiaries and physicians information. He then used this identifying information to file false claims with Medicare for providing the "ortho kits" to Medicare beneficiaries who did not need, were not prescribed and/or did not receive the items. Essang admitted that between Aug. 12, 2007 and Oct. 21, 2008, he filed approximately 736 claims, billing Medicare for \$1,223,255. Medicare actually paid out \$613,096 on the claims.

"Mr. Essang's scheme was designed to defraud a program whose sole purpose is providing medical services to the elderly and the disabled," U.S. Attorney Stephanie A. Finley stated. "His actions defrauded the program and, ultimately, U.S. taxpayers. This office will continue to vigorously pursue charges against those who steal from such programs."

“Durable medical equipment fraud is a major problem that costs taxpayers billions in lost and wasted dollars,” said William W. Root, Assistant Special Agent in Charge, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. “Today’s sentencing is the culmination of a concerted and joint effort by our Inspector General’s Office, the U.S. Attorney’s Office and the Federal Bureau of Investigation to quickly bring to justice those who prey on our elderly for financial gain.”

The Federal Bureau of Investigation and the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Inspector General, conducted the investigation. Assistant U.S. Attorney C. Mignonne Griffing prosecuted the case.

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