

EMBEZZLEMENT

Dental receptionist gets two years in prison for insurance fraud scheme

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A former dental receptionist who defrauded six dentists and at least five banks and insurance companies was sentenced to two years in a federal penitentiary yesterday, after pleading guilty to 11 of the 174 charges she originally faced.

Between 2005 and 2007, Irina Chernyakhovsky embezzled nearly \$200,000 from her employers, five dental offices in Toronto and one in Stouffville.

Ms. Chernyakhovsky also stole an additional \$10,000 in items, including gold jewellery and credit cards, from Dave Freedman's dental office in the Kennedy Road and Eglinton Avenue area.

"It's rank, egregious and it's flagrantly wrong," Dr. Freedman said of the sentence. "I was hoping for at least five or six years."

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Dr. Freedman said that Ms. Chernyakhovsky created invoices for work that was never done and used the names of existing clients to charge insurance companies thousands of dollars in dental care. When the companies paid, Ms. Chernyakhovsky would steal the checks and deposit the money in her own account.

"Her favourite thing was the three-molar root canal ... which costs about \$800 in one visit," Dr. Freedman said.

Hal Kershen, a dentist who lost \$14,000 to Ms. Chernyakhovsky's scheme, said "she would make around \$3,000 some days."

In March 2006, Ms. Chernyakhovsky was arrested and charged with fraud for the first time after she stole more than \$9,000 from a Toronto dentist. She was released and told by the court that she could not seek employment at any other dental offices.

On May 16 and July 16, 2007, Ms. Chernyakhovsky was arrested with failure to comply after police discovered she had taken reception jobs with dentists in the city.

On Oct. 22, 2008, she was arrested after an employee at an Oakville dentist office - where Ms. Chernyakhovsky had just started working - became suspicious and checked into her background.

The dental office discovered Ms. Chernyakhovsky used a false name and reported her to the police. Police officers went to the dental office and arrested her. She has been in custody since.

In addition to the two years Ms. Chernyakhovsky will serve, she will also face three years of probation after she's released.

She will also have to pay restitution to those she defrauded.

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