



From The Courts

Billing dispute

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Physicians in West Palm suit accuse partner's wife of theft

by Dan Lynch

A disbanded radiology group practice in northern Palm Beach County is suing the wife of one of its partners, claiming she stole money from her husband and his colleagues.

Gita Shetty handled medical billing for Palm Beach Radiation Oncology Associates, a four-physician practice in northern Palm Beach County that included her husband, Dr. Sunderam K. Shetty. She did the work out of the North Palm Beach home she shares with Dr. Shetty.

The medical group filed the suit last month in Palm Beach Circuit Court. It accuses her of investing the allegedly stolen money in her home "as well as other assets." The action is for "damages, accounting and equitable relief." It includes the statement that "demand for the return of the funds would be a futile act."

During her tenure as medical biller and collector, Gita Shetty secretly diverted money from the practice "to herself or for her personal benefit," the complaint states. It further claims that "Ms. Shetty falsified, concealed or destroyed billing and bank records to conceal the misconduct."

The complaint says the medical group is "uncertain of the amount of funds diverted."

The plaintiff lawyer, Michael E. O'Connor, a partner at Morgan Carratt & O'Connor in Fort Lauderdale, did not return phone calls seeking comment.



Defense attorney James W. Beasley Jr.: "There's no basis whatever for the allegation of misappropriation of funds."

Gita Shetty has yet to file a response to the complaint. In a brief interview, she said only that "everything is in order."

Her lawyer, James W. Beasley Jr., a partner at Beasley Hauser Kramer & Leonard in West Palm Beach, characterized the suit as "without merit. There's no basis whatever for the allegation of misappropriation of funds."

He said his client's response to the complaint would be filed soon.

The practice consisted of Dr. Shetty, Dr. Anne M. Lewis, Dr. Claude A. Harmon and Dr. Kishore

K. Dass. Operating out of St. Mary's Hospital in West Palm Beach, where Dr. Shetty still practices, and several other hospitals in northern Palm Beach County. The practice treated cancer patients with radiation therapy.

Gita Shetty, in exchange for 6.5 percent of the practice's revenue, handled billing and collections through her own company, Palm Beach Medical Billing, which she operates out of her home.

Beasley said the lawsuit arose from the breakup of the group practice,

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which occurred last summer. One result was a suit against Dr. Shetty by his partners that is now in arbitration.

"The group was doing very well," Beasley said. "They had some internal dissension over management and finances." The other physicians, he said, "now want to complain about things that they never complained about at the time."

The medical group is seeking a court order enjoining Gita Shetty "and anyone acting at her suggestion or direction, from removing, destroying, deleting or altering any documents in the Shetty home, including electronic files and software, harddrives [sic], and backup disks and tapes."

The suit cites no particulars concerning any of the alleged misappro-

priation, Beasley said. No criminal charges have been filed, he said.

"[The plaintiffs] are pretty loose with their allegations about fraud and stealing," he said. "It means nothing. It's just lawyers' words." ♦

Dan Lynch can be reached at dlynch@floridabiz.com or at (561) 820-2071.