



Press Release

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Thief to be sentenced for £100,000 NHS crime spree

Gary Francis O'Neill (36) is the third man to face sentencing for participating in a targeted crime spree hitting UK hospitals. The scheme was unravelled with the help of a national NHS security alert system that better connects the NHS Security Management Service with the police service.

O'Neill, who pleaded guilty in February this year, is charged with conspiracy to steal and commit frauds totalling more than £100,000 at Carlisle Crown Court on Friday 6 June. Two other men, Lee Francis Watson (41) and George Quinn (43), pleaded guilty earlier this year for their involvement and each was sentenced to four-and-a-half years imprisonment.

By sharing security alerts, the police, the NHS Security Management Service (NHS SMS) and NHS local security management specialists (LSMSs) were able to uncover the true extent of the crimes and present substantial evidence during the investigation and subsequent court case.

The investigation found the thieves had stolen personal items, including bank credit cards, which they would then attempt to access at local banks within hours of the thefts.

The NHS SMS first became aware of a series of thefts on 8 January 2007 after a changing room was targeted at the theatres department of William Harvey Hospital, in Ashford, Kent during a morning fire alarm test. Wallets were stolen from ten lockers and at 11.15am, two thieves attempted to use one of the cards to obtain cash, without success. They had been dressed smartly and were wearing NHS ID badge lanyards.

The same day similar thefts took place at the Kent and Canterbury Hospital where a member of staff received a call from a person claiming to be from her bank. She was asked to provide her date of birth and PIN to cancel the card but £250 was then stolen from it.

The Trust's LSMSs took witness statements and alerted the NHS SMS, which issued an alert to other hospitals in the region with descriptions and CCTV images of the individuals.

Similar incidents were found to have occurred at Conquest Hospital and Eastbourne District General Hospital and although the initial thefts were in the South East of England, offences were identified all over the country.

Following a theft at Cumberland Infirmary in Carlisle on 11 June 2007 and the withdrawal of £4,200 from a single bank account, a sharp-eyed bank employee alerted the police after one of the thieves presented the bank card of a doctor she knew from the local hospital, in an attempt to obtain payment. Police later arrested Lee Francis Watson in Carlisle and further investigation of this and other incidents led to the arrest of the other two males.

-more over-

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DC Gary Watson, the investigating officer, was commended by the judge.

Paul Gilderdale of the NHS SMS said:

“The NHS Security Management Service is determined to protect staff and their property. We are pleased that the security alert system has helped to make NHS trusts aware of the threat, and that evidence collected by NHS local security management specialists has helped to reveal the true extent of these crimes.

“These individuals, who are clearly professional criminals, have been convicted of a series of serious, deliberate and calculated crimes against NHS staff and professionals. To target members of caring professions is despicable.

“We would also like to thank Cumbria police for co-ordinating the police effort which crossed no fewer than fourteen police forces. This case is an excellent example of joint working between the police and the NHS, and shows that thieves cannot expect to get away with stealing from and defrauding NHS staff.”

-ENDS-

For more information contact Holly Black at the NHS CFSMS press office on 020 7895 4524 or out-of-hours on 020 7895 4646. Further information on the NHS CFSMS can be found at www.cfsms.nhs.uk

Notes to Editors

1. The NHS SMS was set up in 2003, as part of the NHS Counter Fraud and Security Management Service. The SMS has responsibility for policy and operational matters relating to the management of security within the NHS. It aims to ensure real, permanent improvements are made to provide the best protection for its staff, professionals and property.
2. Figures released in November 2007 show 55,709 reported physical assaults against NHS workers in England, a reduction of 2,986 from the previous year. The figures also showed an increase in the number of prosecutions of people who assaulted NHS staff, from 51 prosecutions in 2002-3 to 869 in 2006-7
3. The NHS SMS began a national syllabus for conflict resolution training for all 750,000 frontline NHS staff in April 2004. The Training gives staff the skills to recognise and defuse potentially violent situations. Figures show that at least 250,000 staff have been trained.
4. Working with the police, Local Security Management Specialists (LSMSs) investigate security breaches and implement new systems to help protect NHS staff and NHS property. As well as the police, all incidents of violence against staff are reported to them. LSMSs receive professional training to oversee security at a local level. This includes areas such as witness interviewing skills and a background in law.
5. The NHS SMS has developed a range of policy and guidance aimed at making the NHS safer and more secure, and this can be found on the ‘publications’ section of the website www.cfsms.nhs.uk
6. The NHS Counter Fraud and Security Management Service is a division of the NHS Business Services Authority (NHSBSA).

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