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4-year prison term ordered for 'drug-dealing doctor'

Judge cites Dr. Daniel Healy's record in delivering a sentence far below the federal guideline of 17 to 22 years. The Duarte physician pleaded guilty to giving painkillers to bogus patients.

By Scott Glover

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A Duarte physician who prosecutors said was "nothing more than a drug dealer in a lab coat" was sentenced to four years in federal prison Wednesday for prescribing powerful and highly addictive pain killers to people who had no medical need for the drugs.

The sentence was far less than the 17 years prosecutors had been seeking for Dr. Daniel J. Healy, and well below federal sentencing guidelines that called for a term of 17 to 22 years.

Monrovia Police Det. Rich Doney, who worked the case with investigators from the Drug Enforcement Administration, called the sentence "a mockery of justice."

"Some of his victims will spend longer than that in rehab," Doney said.

Healy, clad in a green jail-issue jacket and shackled at the waist and ankles, showed no emotion as the sentence was announced.

Before imposing the sentence, U.S. District Judge Manuel L. Real said he struggled with balancing the seriousness of Healy's criminal conduct with his lack of a prior criminal record and the legitimate aspects of his medical practice.

"He's not the ordinary, everyday drug merchant which we see in this court," Real said.

Real seemed conflicted as he gave a long, at times meandering address about the defendant. At one point Real said, "The evidence shows that Dr. Healy was concerned about the addictions of his patients." Moments later, he said, "Dr. Healy was in this for the money. There's no question about that."

Regardless of Healy's motivation, Real noted that as a result of his conviction, Healy's career as a doctor -- and the financial benefits that came with it -- was over.

"Dr. Healy will never be able to do what he's done again when he's released from prison," Real said.

Defense attorney Roger J. Rosen said Healy was thankful for Real's "measured, thoughtful"

sentence that took into account all aspects of the case.

"He did what a judge was supposed to do," Rosen said.

Healy, according to prosecutors, led the nation in 2008 in ordering hydrocodone -- painkillers sold under the brand names Vicodin and Norco. They accused Healy of wildly overprescribing and selling the drug, for which there is a thriving black market, particularly among young adults. Some of Healy's patients were in their late teens and early 20s and had been friends of Healy's sons.

Some patients, court documents state, would leave with hundreds or even thousands of pills at a time.

One man who was observed by police entering Healy's clinic before it opened for the day was pulled over a short time later and had 12 commercial-size bottles of Vicodin and three containers of Xanax in his car -- 7,500 pills in all. The man told police he'd just paid Healy more than \$5,000 cash for the drugs, and was planning to sell them for profit, according to court records.

Healy pleaded guilty in July to intentionally distributing oxycodone without a legitimate medical purpose. The remaining 16 counts against him were dropped in exchange for the plea.

In addition to imposing the four-year prison term, Real sentenced Healy to 10 years supervised release, 5,000 hours of community service and a \$150,000 fine.

"The end result is that this particular drug-dealing doctor is off the streets," said Assistant U.S. Atty. David Herzog, who prosecuted the case.