



Patient lost teeth after chemo he didn't need

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DETROIT — A man with lower back pain was treated like he had blood cancer and given chemotherapy and radiation — even though tests showed he didn't have cancer, an expert testified Wednesday [at the sentencing hearing for Dr. Farid Fata](#).

The once-prominent Oakland County physician, facing prison for insurance fraud by grossly over treating hundreds of patients, quietly watched in a federal courtroom in downtown Detroit as the expert witness described the treatment of Robert Sobieray, who was told he also had metastatic bone cancer.

"I'm not sure what they thought they were radiating," said Dr. David Steensma, associate professor at Harvard Medical School and cancer physician at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston, who testified for prosecutors.

He said Sobieray was even misled on the side effects of Zometa, the chemotherapy drug with a possible side effect of bone death, typically

in the jaw.

"Fata told Robert that Zometa doesn't cause anything," he said. On Tuesday, Sobieray made his own statement in front of the court: "I have one tooth left. I had to have pieces of my gums and teeth cut out."



Victims and their families walk across the street from the federal courthouse after testimony was heard in the sentencing hearing of cancer doctor Farid Fata July 6, 2015, in Detroit. (Photo: David Guralnick, AP)

The former patient said he gets sick to his stomach every time he thinks of Fata's name. On cross-examination by defense attorney Mark Kriger, Steensma acknowledged documents from a dentist indicating Sobieray had longstanding dental problems, but he said he'd defer to a specialist to say whether there was a correlation. Fata, 50, pleaded guilty in September to 13 counts of health care fraud, two counts of money laundering and one count of conspiring to pay and receive kickbacks. His sentencing hearing resumes at 9 a.m. Thursday, when the defense team is expected to call its witnesses.

Other former patients on Tuesday called him "evil monster" and referred to him as "Mr. Fata," saying he no longer deserves the title of "doctor."

Steensma said he'd reviewed about 100 patients' files and found 2,770 incidents of unnecessary chemotherapy among hundreds of other bad treatments. He said he'd never seen anything like it. "I promise I only used G-rated words in my notes," he said near the start of his testimony Wednesday morning.

He described five patients treated with Velcade, a drug with side effects of sometimes permanent peripheral neuropathy (numbness or pain in the hands or feet), when it wasn't medically necessary, and how he told a patient who had numbness that moving his or her feet and toes would make it get better.

Federal prosecutors said Fata, who raked in millions of dollars, had more than 500 victims.

Many of them have been giving statements in court this week on the horrors they endured. On Tuesday, about 22 victim statements were read in U.S. District Judge Paul Borman's court. Some statements were read by the family members of patients who've since died. Prosecutors seek a 175-year prison sentence, but Fata's attorneys want that lowered to 25 years. It's unclear what day Fata will be sentenced; the hearing began Monday and is expected to last all week.

Fata, a married father of three and a naturalized U.S. citizen whose native country is Lebanon, was charged with running a \$35 million Medicare fraud scheme that involved billing the government for medically unnecessary cancer and blood treatments. The government said Fata ran the scheme from 2009 to 2014 through his medical businesses including Michigan Hematology Oncology Centers, with offices in Clarkston, Bloomfield Hills, Lapeer, Sterling Heights, Troy and Oak Park.



The office of Dr. Farid Fata is seen in Oak Park, Mich., Monday, Aug. 12, 2013. (Photo: Carlos Osorio/Associated Press)

Attorney Brian McKeen, who is representing several of Fata's victims in civil court, issued a statement through his office Wednesday:

"One question was asked over and over, 'How was Dr. Fata allowed to get away with this?' In the pending civil litigation we hope to answer that question and hold accountable everyone who played a role in this epidemic of medical malpractice."

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