

Scam Alert: Practitioners Should Beware Fake Calls From Scammers Posing as “DEA Agents”

Doctors who prescribe controlled substances should be vigilant amid a reported uptick in scam calls whereby the caller poses as a DEA or other federal agent and threatens prosecution for “opioid trafficking” or other illegal drug activity if the victim does not pay “fine.” The scam is so prevalent that the DEA’s Diversion Control Division has created its own online reporting form, found [here](#).

“Shakedown” Telephone Scams

Although the calls are targeting physicians, these calls are just a subset of the larger wave of fraudulent telephone scams, using “shakedown” tactics to secure payments from unwitting targets. Physicians who receive these calls should disregard them, protect their personal information, and [report incidents to the DEA](#).

According to reports of both physician victims and the DEA, the scam works in a variety of ways, including:

- False phone numbers such that “Drug Enforcement Administration” often appears on the victim’s caller ID;
- The “agent” callers using fake names and badge numbers of DEA officials;
- Threats of arrest, prosecution, imprisonment, and/or revocation of DEA number if the victim does not comply with the caller’s demands;
- Aggressive tone by the scam callers;
- Demands for money via wire transfer (or untraceable gift cards taken over the phone);
- Requests for personal information, e.g. Social Security Number or birthdate; and
- References to the provider’s National Provider Identifier and/or claims that patients are making accusations against the practitioner.

In several instances, California physicians received voice messages from an individual identifying himself as a “special agent,” using an apparently fictional name and referencing a specific DEA “case file” number. The scammer provided a callback number.

Official Alert Issued by the Drug Enforcement Administration

According to the DEA—which has issued its own warning addressing the “[alarming increase of scam calls](#)”—the scammers often demand a “fine” via wire transfer in lieu of arresting, prosecuting and/or conducting further investigation into the victim.

Importantly, the DEA reminds practitioners that DEA personnel will never contact practitioners via telephone to demand money or other payment, nor will it request personal information. Rather, practitioners should be reminded that legitimate enforcement activity typically initiated via official letter or in-person by an agent with a search warrant.

The scamming activity is disturbing because it coincides with the ongoing DEA crackdown on prescription opioid diversion – about which doctors should be concerned. As Nelson Hardiman co-managing partner Harry Nelson describes in [The United States of Opioids](#), despite evidence that illegal trafficking of heroin and fentanyl have become much bigger sources of harm, the DEA continues to focus disproportionately on policing prescribing and dispensing. Ultimately, physicians need to be careful to differentiate between legitimate investigations and opportunistic scams.

For more information about this client alert, please contact:



[Kristina Sherry](#)
Attorney at Law
ksherry@nelsonhardiman.com

[Harry Nelson](#)
Co-Managing Partner
hnelson@nelsonhardiman.com