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Dade to North Carolina after the feds suspected him of scamming Medicare was sentenced to 14 years in prison on Monday and ordered to reimburse the taxpayer-funded program \$28 million.

Feb. 26, 2013

Feb. 26 — A local businessman who moved his mental-health treatment chain from Miami-Dade to North Carolina after the feds suspected him of scamming Medicare was sentenced to 14 years in prison on Monday and ordered to reimburse the taxpayer-funded program \$28 million.

Kept behind bars since his arrest in May 2012, Armando “Manny” Gonzalez pleaded guilty in December to stealing tens of millions of dollars from Medicare by fraudulently billing the federal program and laundering the proceeds to support an affluent lifestyle.

Gonzalez, 50, a convicted cocaine trafficker who joined the Medicare rackets in the mid-2000s, had opened a pair of mental health clinics in the Kendall and Cutler Bay areas. By 2008, he moved himself and his business to North Carolina to stay one step ahead of federal agents. But they caught up with him.

Before his arrest, he was planning to open another psychotherapy clinic in Tennessee.

Gonzalez was indicted with others on charges of conspiring to defraud \$63 million from Medicare. He was ordered held without bail after prosecutors argued he was a “flight risk” to his native Cuba.

Dozens of Cuban immigrants charged in South Florida with trying to bilk the federal healthcare program for seniors have fled to the island, which historically has turned

a blind eye and doesn't return the fugitives to the United States because the nations

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Care Solutions Network, with 10 pleading guilty so far.

According to court records, the company billed both Medicare and the Florida Medicaid program for purported mental health services that patients did not need or were never provided.

Gonzalez's three clinics — accused of entertaining patients with TV and movies instead of providing actual group psychotherapy sessions — collected \$28 million in Medicare payments from 2004 to 2011. Justice Department lawyers said in court papers that the “vast majority” of the money “disappeared” with a “substantial portion ... laundered through shell corporations.”

Already pleading guilty in the scheme have been John Thoen, a registered nurse sentenced to nine years in prison, and three employees: Alexandra Haynes, Serena Joslin and Sarah Da Silva Keller.

Daniel Martinez, Raymond Rivero, Ivon Perez and Alba Serrano, operators of three assisted-living facilities in the Homestead area called Mi Renacer, God Is First and Kayleen and Denis Care, also have pleaded guilty.

The ALF operators took bribes from Gonzalez in exchange for supplying a steady stream of patients, many of whom suffered from dementia and Alzheimer's disease. They could not have benefited from the therapy, prosecutors said.

“Once the unqualified patients were admitted to [Health Care Solutions Network], Gonzalez’s employees would fabricate virtually every portion of the patients’ mental health medical records,” the Justice Department said in a statement.

“The fake medical records were then utilized to support false billings to government-sponsored health care benefit programs and to avoid detection by Medicare auditors.”

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