

# How Medicaid Dentist Pulled City's 800G

By WILLIAM SHERMAN

(Tenth of a Series)

Fred Fisher is a medicaid dentist with an East Harlem practice who neatly extracted \$800,000 from the city in two years, much of it in an alleged double billing scheme for false teeth and other work that some of his patients never needed in the first place.

Although indicted two years ago by a Manhattan grand jury on 241 counts of submitting fraudulent bills, Fisher, 37, is still running his medicaid operation at 1690 Lexington Ave. out of the second floor of an old frame building.

Since he opened his nine-chair office at 103d St. six years ago, Fisher has billed the city for more than \$1 million, much of it for work performed by other dentists in his employ.

## Hired by the Hour

Under city regulations, a dentist may hire colleagues on a salary basis, usually about \$10 an hour, and can bill medicaid personally for all the work done in his office.

There are about 300 medicaid dental offices in the city, and a NEWS

probe has shown that many of them are part of group medical practices, drawing their clientele from other specialists, including doctors, chiropractors, and podiatrists.

Dentists are the second highest individual medicaid billers next to physicians, and in the last four years have been paid more than \$137 million by the city.

Recently, a reporter posing as a

## MEDICAID PROBE

patient and carrying a medicaid card visited Fisher's operations. A fat man in a white smock met the reporter at the door. It was Fisher.

## Photographer Follows

"Come inside, brother, we'll take good care of you," he said, and the patient, followed by a NEWS photographer posing as his cousin, was led through a long room to a seat in the rear.

"I'll be back in a minute, just sit tight," he said, taking the patient's medicaid card.

The floors and walls in the one-room office were filthy and unpainted, the counters and tables were piled high with models of false teeth, and instruments lay scattered about on tables with X-rays, dental charts, and other papers. In one corner of the room, two women in casual clothes were working on two old men.

Fisher returned, a set of old dentures in one hand, and said, "Okay, we're going to X-ray your mouth."

## 'You Haven't Looked'

"Hold on a second," said the patient, "I haven't even opened my mouth. You haven't looked at my teeth yet."

"I got to take X-rays, buddy."

"Look in my mouth first."

Fisher stuck a finger in the patient's mouth, looked inside without using a mirror and said, "Seems okay to me but we've got to do a cleaning."

"Okay," said the patient.

"But first I got to take X-rays."

"If all I need is a cleaning, why X-rays?"

"That's the way it's done, brother."

"Well, I don't want it done that way."

"All right, brother," he growled,

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Fred Fisher

Billed city for over \$1 million

# How a Dentist Pulled 800G

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"take a walk, get out of here."

The patient, relieved, retrieved his Medicaid card and left the office.

In a recent Health Department survey of Fisher's operation, 42 out of 173 sets of patients' X-rays were declared unnecessary. Fisher was reminded that overutilization of radiation is injurious to a patient's health.

Fisher, who at different times employed about 20 dentists, billed the city for \$200,000 in 1967 and \$200,000 in 1968.

The Health Department, noting that Fisher was the highest-billing dentist in the city for those two years, began investigating his practice.

That investigation, together with a subsequent inquiry by Manhattan Assistant District At-

torney John Fine, resulted in indictment handed up on March 18, 1971, in which Fisher was charged with submitting invoices for false teeth that weren't provided, billing twice for teeth that were, and billing for fillings, extractions and other services that weren't performed.

One sample of Fisher's alleged double-billing method cited in the indictment showed that on Feb. 24, 1968, he billed the city for \$320 for a full upper denture and partial lower denture for a woman, and then on April 4 of that year billed for dentures again for the same woman.

When called down to the Health Department for a hearing, Fisher protested that he was being persecuted and had given each of the 10,000 Medicaid patients who passed through his office high-quality care.

Although the Health Department suspended Fisher from Medicaid his attorney obtained a court order allowing him to continue billing the city because his case had not been heard in court.

He still hasn't stood trial, and in 1971 billed the city for \$54,159 and during the first six months of last year for \$28,381.

In his most recent appearance at the Health Department, he was confronted with a survey of the work in his offices on 173 patients where in 21 cases decay was indicated on X-ray charts but was not treated.

Since the Fisher case, the Health Department has imposed restrictions on dental practices such as providing false teeth and taking X-rays, but billing abuses by dentists continue.

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