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**FORMER DIRECTOR AT TWO QUEENS NURSING HOMES CHARGED WITH STEALING
MORE THAN 1,500 OXYCODONE PILLS FROM FACILITIES**

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz announced that Charles Gonder was arraigned on drug charges today following an investigation into his past employment as the nursing director at two nursing homes -- the Regal Heights Rehabilitation & Nursing Center, and the Sapphire Center for Rehabilitation and Nursing of Central Queens. He is accused of stealing more than 1,500 oxycodone pills, which were meant to be destroyed, from the facilities.

District Attorney Katz said: “As an official at two Queens nursing homes, this defendant was entrusted with the safety of patients under his care including the safe disposal of narcotics. We allege he violated that trust after a long-term investigation by my office found more than 1,500 oxycodone pills were missing from the two facilities. He was arrested today and will now face justice in court. Thank you to our partners at the New York State Department of Health’s Bureau of Narcotics Enforcement for their work on this case.”

Gonder, 52, of 30th Drive in Astoria, was arraigned today on a criminal complaint charging him with criminal possession of a controlled substance in the first and third degrees, 26 counts of falsifying business records in the first degree, two counts of falsifying business records in the second degree, two counts of fraud and deceit related to controlled substances and two counts of petit larceny.

If convicted, he faces up to 20 years in prison.

Judge Edward Daniels ordered the defendants to return to court on October 15.

According to the charges and investigation:

- Gonder applied for a management job at the Regal Heights Rehabilitation & Nursing Center in Jackson Heights in May 2023. He left blank the answer to a question on the job application that asked if he had ever been convicted of a crime. He had two prior criminal convictions in Nassau County including one felony.
- Gonder was hired by the nursing home on May 4, 2023. He was the acting director of nursing services and was responsible for the collection and storage of all unused medication, including narcotics, at the facility. The nursing home’s procedures required information on unused medication to be logged into an internal database and then the drugs were to be placed into a locked receptacle.
- Gonder was terminated from the position eight days later, on May 12, 2023.
- After Gonder left the facility, an audit conducted by the state Department of Health on June 26, 2023, revealed that 141 oxycodone pills linked to four prescriptions were missing from a receptacle bin. Records indicated that they were placed in the bin on May 10, 2023, and that Gonder accepted the pills for disposal.
- Gonder accepted 30 pills from one of those prescriptions and was also handed another 15 leftover pills from the same prescription. Packaging for those pills was later found in a desk used by Gonder and all but one were missing.

- Gonder contended he put the loose pills in the disposal bin, but they were not found there.
- On May 18, 2023, Gonder applied for a management position at the Sapphire Center for Rehabilitation and Nursing of Central Queens in Flushing. He did not answer an application question about whether he had ever been convicted of a crime.
- He was hired on May 22, 2023, as assistant director of nursing services and later became director of nursing services. He was responsible for the collection, documentation and disposal of unused prescription medication.
- Gonder and the nursing home administrator were the only employees who could access locked drug receptable bins, which were in Gonder's office.
- A March 2024 audit of the nursing home's narcotics log, which tracks the receipt and disposal of unused narcotics, found that 1,534 oxycodone pills associated with 66 prescriptions that were to be placed in the receptable bins were missing from those bins.
- A logbook indicated that Gonder had acknowledged receipt of pills from 26 of the 66 prescriptions.
- Gonder was terminated last month.
- He was arrested on August 13.

The investigation was conducted with the assistance of Nekiesha Henry, Senior Narcotic Investigator for the New York State Bureau of Narcotic Enforcement's New York City Office

Assistant District Attorney Kieran Linehan, Supervisor of the Major Narcotics Unit in the District Attorney's Major Economic Crimes Bureau, is prosecuting the case under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Mary Lowenburg, Bureau Chief, Catherine C. Kane, Senior Deputy Bureau Chief, and Jonathan Scharf, Deputy Bureau Chief, and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Gerard Brave.

Criminal complaints and indictments are accusations. A defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

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