

NEW YORK POST

Sunday, April 06, 2008

SHOCKING RAP SHEET OF 'SCAM A DAY' HEALTH INSURER

By **SUSAN EDELMAN**

April 6, 2008 -- A giant health-insurance company linked by Attorney General Andrew Cuomo to an alleged scheme to rip off millions of New Yorkers has been accused of numerous tactics to deny coverage for consumers and boost profits, The Post has learned.

Cuomo recently accused a data-collection company, Ingenix Inc., of a scheme to rig health-care cost data - helping major insurance companies slash reimbursement to health-care providers and force patients to pay more out of pocket, he charged.

But Ingenix's parent company, UnitedHealth Group Inc. - which reported \$73 billion in revenues last year - has shortchanged New York hospitals, doctors and patients for years, getting away with only slaps on the wrist, critics charge.

"It's a scam a day," said David Rosen, CEO of MediSys Health Network, which includes Jamaica, Flushing and Brookdale hospitals. "Like shoplifters, they constantly find new ways to rip us off."

The MediSys hospitals last year filed a Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act suit in Brooklyn Federal court against United and its New York subsidiaries - United Healthcare of New York and Oxford Health Insurance. Company officials call it a "contract dispute".

In 2006, then-Attorney General Eliot Spitzer found that United Healthcare's Empire Plan "erroneously" listed some doctors as in-network, which allows patients to make a small co-payment.

Instead, policyholders were saddled with much higher bills - based on out-of-network fees. The company blamed "computer programming problems."

Last August, United agreed to pay \$20 million in a 37-state settlement stemming from delays in handling claims, use of incorrect rates and excessive denials.

New York's Insurance Department collected for \$4 million.

The department ranks United the worst of 29 insurers, based on complaints in 2006.

Company spokesman Tyler Mason said United has "learned from our mistakes," and reaffirmed its commitment to improve.

Last August, United agreed to pay \$20 million in a 37-state settlement stemming from widespread complaints of delays in handling claims, use of incorrect rates and excessive denials.

susan.edelman@nypost.com