



The United States Attorney's Office

## Central District of California

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Central District of California

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Release No. 10-079

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### EX-UCLA HEALTHCARE EMPLOYEE SENTENCED TO FEDERAL PRISON FOR ILLEGALLY PEEKING AT PATIENT RECORDS

LOS ANGELES – A former UCLA Healthcare System employee who admitted to illegally reading private and confidential medical records, mostly from celebrities and other high-profile patients, was sentenced today to four months in federal prison.

Huping Zhou, 47, of Los Angeles, was sentenced this afternoon by United States Magistrate Judge Andrew J. Wistrich, who condemned Zhou for his lack of respect for patient privacy.

Zhou pleaded guilty in January to four misdemeanor counts of violating the federal privacy provisions of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Zhou specifically admitted to knowingly obtaining individually identifiable health information without a valid reason, medical or otherwise. Zhou is the first person in the nation to be convicted and incarcerated for misdemeanor HIPAA offenses for merely accessing confidential records without a valid reason or authorization.

Zhou, who is a licensed cardiothoracic surgeon in China, was employed in 2003 at UCLA Healthcare System as a researcher with the UCLA School of Medicine. On October 29, 2003, Zhou received a notice of intent to dismiss him from UCLA Healthcare for job performance reasons unrelated to his illegal access of medical records. That night, Zhou, without any legal or medical reason, accessed and read his immediate supervisor's medical records and those of other co-workers. For the next three weeks, Zhou's continued his illegal accessing of patient records and expanded his illegal conduct to include confidential health records belonging to various celebrities. According to court documents, Zhou accessed the UCLA patient records system 323 times during the three-week period, with most of the accesses involving well recognized celebrities.

In his plea agreement, Zhou admitted that he obtained and read private patient health and medical information on four specific occasions after he was formally terminated from the UCLA Healthcare System. Zhou acknowledged that at the time he viewed these patients' medical information, he had no legitimate reason, medical or otherwise, for obtaining the personal information.

There is no evidence that Zhou improperly used or attempted to sell any of the information that he illegally accessed.

The UCLA Healthcare System, the UCLA School of Medicine and the UCLA Medical Group fully cooperated in the investigation, which was conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

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