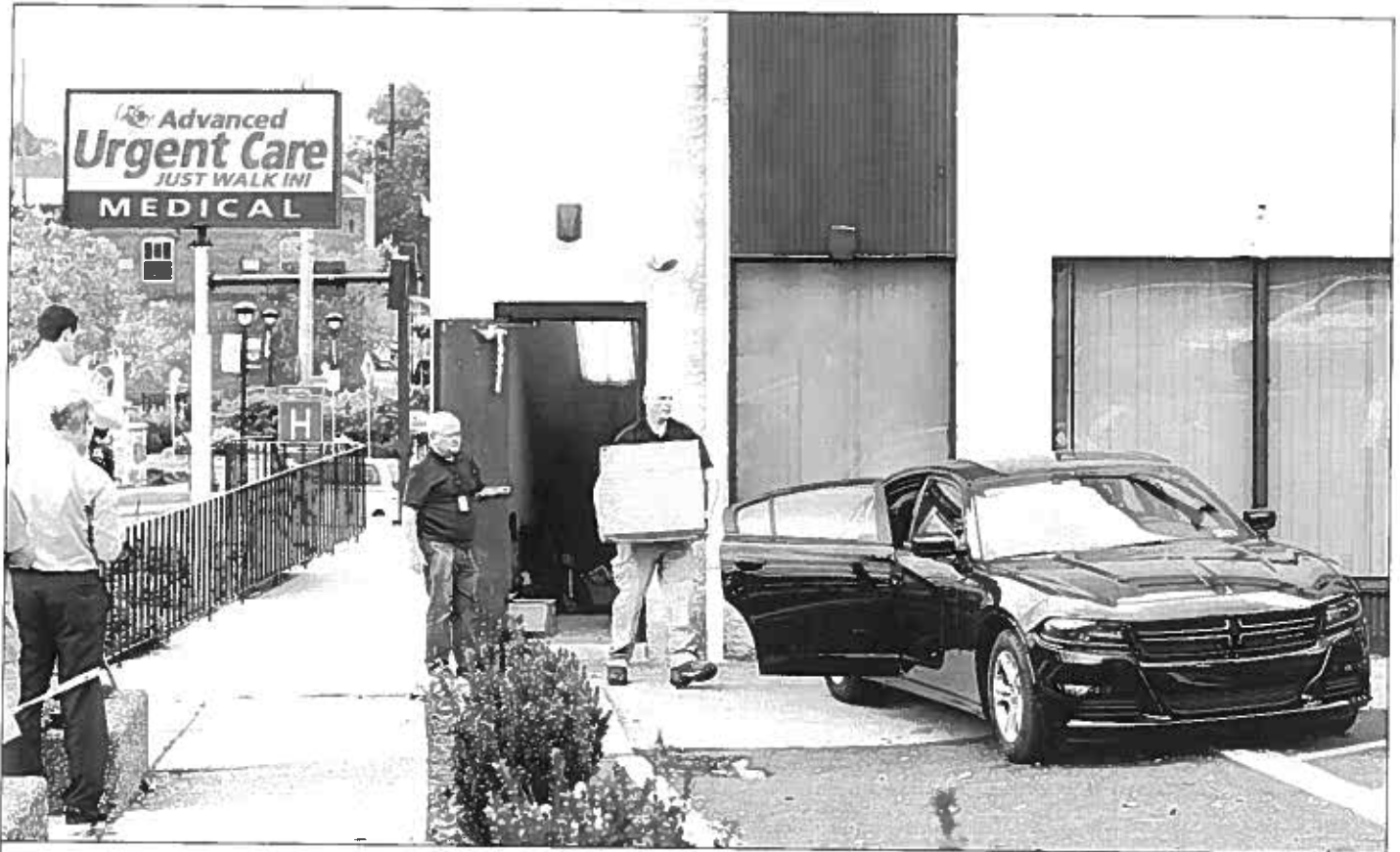


TOP OVERSEAS VISITORS, CAMERON B. HALLACK / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

TOP OVERSEAS VISITORS INCREASED 4.2 PERCENT, JEC FORUM ON 11/3



Federal investigators remove boxes of evidence from the Advanced Urgent Care facility in Willow Grove after authorities closed two offices as part of an ongoing investigation into opioid prescription abuse. Advanced Urgent Care is a chain

owned by Mehdi Nikparvarfar, who was approved by the state Department of Health to recommend marijuana for patients. He also is accused of threatening to kill a U.S. marshal. JOSEPH KAL ZMAREK

1 pot doc jailed, 1 cited

Two of about 100 doctors approved for recommending medical marijuana in Pennsylvania face legal troubles.

By Sam Wood
STAFF WRITER

At least two Pennsylvania doctors whom the state approved to recommend medical marijuana will not be seeing patients anytime soon. Mehdi Nikparvarfar, who owns six urgent-care facilities, has been held on federal charges in Philadelphia since August for allegedly threatening to kill a U.S. marshal. Jan Neil Widerman, an osteopathic pediatrician who practices in Northeast Philadelphia, was arrested in March 2016 after firefighters allegedly discovered a pot-growing operation in his burning house. Police seized 40 marijuana plants, parapherna-

lia, and about \$16,400 from Widerman's home in Holland, Bucks County. On June 18, he was found guilty on a misdemeanor drug possession charge and sentenced to 12 months' probation. In an interview, Widerman, who is also an addiction specialist, said the marijuana was for his sick wife, who suffers from nerve pain. Nikparvarfar and Widerman are two of about 100 doctors whom the Pennsylvania Department of Health has approved to write recommendations for medical cannabis. Doctors cannot write prescriptions because the drug continues to be prohibited by federal law. The state has approved 50 doctors in the five-county Philadelphia region. Only Nikparvarfar and Widerman had suspended licenses, according to state records. A spokeswoman for the Department of Health said that since the publication of the doctor registry, Nikparvarfar and Widerman See **DOCTORS** on A13



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Doctors

Continued from A11

had been removed from the registry list. "This means that they cannot certify patients and no patients have been certified by these practitioners," said April Hutcheson.

Documents published on the website, however, remained unchanged on Tuesday and continue to include the two doctors with suspended licenses.

Nikparvarfard's license to practice medicine was suspended on Sept. 15. On Sept. 27, the state suspended Widerman's license for two years. Hutcheson said the doctors had applied before news of their suspensions was made public.

Nikparvarfard, also known as Nikparvarfar, Nikparvar-Fard and Mehdi Armani, has been the subject of a lengthy DEA investigation for suspicion of operating pill mills in Philadelphia, Scranton, Wilkes-Barre, and Willow Grove.

Agents raided several Nikparvarfard's Advanced Urgent Care centers in July 2015 and again last month. The centers are also known as Elite Medical and Rehabilitation. The DEA and FBI removed several boxes of files on Oct. 23 from Nikparvarfard's Willow Grove outpost on Easton

Road. His lawyer, Donald W. Moser, declined to comment.

The matter with the U.S. marshals occurred Aug. 29, when three agents served an arrest warrant on Nikparvarfard at his clinic at 5058 City Ave. in Philadelphia, according to an affidavit by DEA Agent Daniel Soeffing. When the federal agents approached the physician, Nikparvarfard claimed he was not the man they were looking for and presented a driver's license with the name Mehdi Armani. The marshals were not convinced.

On the ride to the federal courthouse, comments made by the handcuffed Nikparvarfard were recorded by an agent's cellphone, according to the affidavit. Authorities said that the doctor let fly a stream of expletives, and told one of the marshals he would pay someone \$5,000 to shoot the marshal in the head. When the group arrived at the federal building, marshals discovered that Nikparvarfard was carrying a concealed .380 pistol.

Nikparvarfard allegedly told authorities that the gun was loaded.

Widerman, who also has a practice focusing on addiction, said that he hoped to have the misdemeanor drug possession charges expunged so he could return to his patients. In the meantime, his partner will pick



Advanced Urgent Care in Willow Grove. Agents raided several of the centers in July 2015 and again last month. JOSEPH KACZMAREK

up his clients.

"I'm anxious to get back to work and help these people," Widerman said. "They made me abandon my patients."

The physician registry for medical marijuana was published Nov. 1 and will be updated as doctors are certified after taking a continuing education course and registering with the state Department of Health.

"To remain as an approved practitioner with the medical marijuana program and listed on the Patient and Caregiver Registry, a physician's license has to remain

in good status," said the state's Hutcheson. "If their license status changes, they will be removed from the registry."

Gov. Wolf signed a bill legalizing medical cannabis in April 2016. Patients with one of the 17 qualifying conditions are eligible to participate in the state program, which is expected to provide cannabis oils, lotions and tinctures by early 2018. No smokable marijuana will be available under state law.

✉ samwood@phillynews.com
☎ 215-854-2796

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