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## **Doctor accused of prescribing painkillers for cash**

Dr. Nazar Al Bussam, 71, of Newport Coast, who has offices in Los Angeles and Downey, and two assistants are charged with engaging in a criminal conspiracy to distribute drugs.

By Lisa Girion, Los Angeles Times

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A physician with offices in Los Angeles and Downey was arrested Wednesday for allegedly prescribing powerful painkillers for cash to people who had no medical need for them, federal officials said.

Dr. Nazar Al Bussam, 71, of Newport Coast was arrested after several pharmacies notified authorities that customers were coming in with prescriptions from him for large amounts of highly addictive and widely abused narcotics, including Norco, OxyContin and Vicodin, officials said.

Bussam's practice first came to the attention of federal drug enforcement officials in 2007 when a review of government databases indicated that he was among the top 10 prescribers of such drugs in the Los Angeles area, according to a complaint filed in U.S. District Court.

Several of Bussam's purported patients have been arrested in California and Texas for illegally selling drugs obtained with prescriptions written by him. He is alleged to have sold prescriptions to undercover agents for \$100 apiece. The alleged illegal sales earned Bussam more than \$1 million a year, according to estimates of U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration agents who reviewed his records.

Also arrested Wednesday were Bussam's assistants, Rosemary Mendoza, 75, of West Covina, and James Park, 72, of Corona. All three were charged with engaging in a criminal conspiracy to distribute drugs, a charge that carries a penalty of up to 20 years in prison.

Bussam and his assistants could not be reached for comment.

He is the latest in a string of area physicians whose prescribing habits have come under scrutiny in recent months.

In April, Duarte physician Daniel J. Healy was sentenced to four years in federal prison after he was convicted of prescribing painkillers to people who didn't need them.

In July, Marc Abrams, a Valley Village physician under investigation by Los Angeles County drug authorities, committed suicide at his Silver Lake home.

Also in July, San Fernando physician Masoud Bamdad was sentenced to 25 years in federal prison after he was convicted of prescribing painkillers to patients who did not need them.

In August, authorities raided the Rowland Heights practice of Dr. Lisa Tseng, an osteopath who is under investigation for prescribing painkillers to patients who don't need them.

And in September, Los Angeles County authorities arrested Zhiwei Lin at his Western Avenue practice in the Harvard Heights neighborhood for allegedly writing illegal prescriptions.