

# Judge sentences wealthy South Florida doctor to two years in multimillion-dollar tax evasion case

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04/27/2015 12:02 PM  
04/27/2015 3:40 PM



A prominent gastroenterologist admitted in Miami federal court will forever have an asterisk next to his name for being a convicted tax cheat after failing to report \$18 million in income to the U.S. government.

JOE RAEDLE GETTY FILE PHOTO

In his own words, South Florida physician Krishna Tripuraneni had it all: a beautiful family, a successful medical practice, great wealth, even a reputation as a good Samaritan.

“I was a role model to everyone in this community,” the prominent gastroenterologist said in Miami federal court Monday.

But now, filled with shame, Tripuraneni said he will forever have an “asterisk” next to his name for being a convicted tax cheat who failed to report \$18 million in income to the U.S. government.

“At the end of the day, I feel I have nothing to show for it,” Tripuraneni, 56, told U.S. District Judge Darrin Gayles, after noting he had come to the United States from India as an immigrant. “It’s an embarrassment, and it’s something I will have to take to my grave.”

After his apology, Gayles gave the physician a two-year prison sentence — instead of probation sought by his defense lawyers and the maximum three years recommended by the U.S. attorney’s office.

Gayles said he tried to balance the “duality” of Tripuraneni’s life in crafting a fair prison sentence, taking into consideration both his “very big mistake” and his overall accomplishments. The judge also said he tried to understand why the physician committed tax evasion on such a grand scale, admitting he could not find an answer.

“Perhaps it was the need for more homes, more cars,” Gayles said. “I don’t understand it.”

But in the end, with about 35 supporters in the courtroom, Gayles told Tripuraneni that there had to be “consequences” for his misconduct, imposing prison time along with a \$50,000 fine and 200 hours of community service after he completes his sentence.

The Palm Beach County physician, who lives in a 16,000-square-foot mansion in exclusive Manalapan with a tennis court and pool overlooking the Atlantic Ocean, must surrender to prison authorities on June 26.

At Monday’s sentencing, Tripuraneni’s defense attorneys, Roy Black and Marcos Beaton, dramatized the physician’s “extraordinary responsibility” not only to his family but to others — including 17 years of weekly voluntary work at a hospital in the poverty-stricken community of Belle Glade.

“Dr. Tripuraneni doesn’t just have his own family to support,” Black told the judge. “The whole medical community is his family.”

The physician’s attorneys also highlighted his “extraordinary restitution” to the federal government, saying he has already paid dearly for his crime.

“He was a well respected doctor,” Beaton said. “He is [now] a convicted felon.”

Assistant U.S. Attorney Christopher Clark argued for a prison sentence up to three years, the maximum allowed for his crime.

In January, Tripuraneni pleaded guilty to a charge of tax evasion in a plea agreement, for filing a false income-tax return for 2006. But he was held liable for unpaid taxes between 2004 and 2008 under the agreement. His tax bill, with interest and penalties, added up to about \$12 million — all of which he paid to the Internal Revenue Service, including a final interest payment last week.

According to a statement filed with his plea agreement, Tripuraneni acknowledged that he used “funds” from his gastroenterology practice in Wellington and two other Palm Beach County medical businesses “to pay for expenses” on his new Manalapan home, other real estate investments and tuition payments. The oceanfront home is valued at \$12 million, public records show.

“Some of these payments were then classified as professional consulting, building repairs and miscellaneous expenses by the companies,” said the statement, signed by the physician, his defense attorney, Black, and the prosecutor, Clark.

“These payments resulted in falsified profit and loss statements being provided to the tax return preparer” for both his corporate and personal returns, the statement said. “These returns were false in that the corporate returns included fraudulent business expenses ... thereby understating the defendant’s total income and the tax due and owing on his personal return.”

As a result, the physician's income taxes owed for 2004-2008 totaled about \$6.4 million, without interest and penalties. The highest taxes due — more than \$1.5 million — were for 2006. He only pleaded guilty for that year's return, filed jointly with his wife, Nirmala.

Tripuraneni's attorney, Black, told the Miami Herald that his client would be able to keep his state medical license because he did not commit his crime while practicing his profession.

The tax-evasion charges, first filed against Tripuraneni in late 2013 in federal court in West Palm Beach, resulted from an IRS and FBI criminal investigation.

Tripuraneni, who obtained his Florida medical license in 1993, has no history of disciplinary action, according to the state Department of Health website. According to his biography, Tripuraneni obtained his medical degree from Osmania Medical College in India and specializes in gastroenterology at Wellington Regional Medical Center and Palms West Hospital.

Another prominent South Florida doctor, Alan Mendelsohn, was able to resume practicing medicine after he pleaded guilty in 2010 to a similar tax-evasion charge and served a four-year sentence.

Mendelsohn, a Hollywood eye doctor and onetime GOP fundraiser, conspired to defraud the U.S. government by failing to report about \$700,000 of income he had secretly diverted from campaign donations and lobbying clients.