
PANZAMAURER

ATTORNEYS AND COUNSELORS AT LAW
Coastal Towers | Suite 905
2400 East Commercial Boulevard
Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33308
954.390.0100

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Will the DEA Ever Call Me?

I often receive calls from licensed practitioners in Florida who believe they have just received a telephone call from the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). Sometimes it is a Friday afternoon at 4:00 p.m.; other times it is a Tuesday morning at 9:00 a.m. Scammers do not play by a set schedule, and they certainly do not follow a set playbook.

The scenario usually plays out something like this.

A physician receives a call from someone identifying himself as a DEA agent. The caller provides a callback number, badge number or identification number and then explains that the physician's NPI number has somehow been connected to illegal controlled substances being transported across the southern border.

The caller may threaten arrest, loss of the physician's DEA registration or other legal action. Eventually, the physician is instructed to pay a fine electronically. In some cases, the caller may even suggest that the physician report to the local police department and turn himself or herself in.

What happens next depends on the practitioner. Some unfortunately follow the caller's instructions. Others have a moment of lucid thought and ask: **Is this really the DEA?**

Fortunately, the answer is almost always no.

The DEA Knows About This Scam

The DEA has an entire **Scam Alert** dedicated to criminals impersonating DEA agents and targeting medical practitioners.

The details are remarkably similar to the calls I hear about from Florida practitioners. Scammers may use fake badge numbers, names of actual law-enforcement officials and telephone numbers that appear legitimate. They may know the practitioner's NPI number, state license number, practice address or other professional information.

That knowledge does **not** mean the caller is legitimate. In fact, the DEA specifically warns that scammers use NPI and state license numbers to make these calls appear authentic.

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The DEA has also warned about a variation of the scam in which the victim is told that his or her identity has been connected to a vehicle stopped at the border containing illegal drugs.

Sound familiar?

So, Will the DEA Ever Call Me?

The DEA warns that its personnel will **not** call medical practitioners demanding money or another form of payment and will not ask for personal or sensitive information over the telephone. The DEA also states that notification of a legitimate investigation or legal action is made **in person or by official letter**.

So, if someone claiming to be a DEA agent tells you that your NPI number has been connected to illegal controlled substances and that you must immediately pay a fine electronically, **do not pay it**.

The caller's knowledge of your NPI number does not change that advice. Neither does a badge number, callback number or caller ID that appears to come from the DEA. Telephone numbers can be spoofed, and much of a healthcare practitioner's professional information is publicly available.

What Should You Do?

When a practitioner calls me after receiving one of these calls, my advice is generally straightforward: **stop communicating with the caller. Do not send money. Do not provide personal or financial information.**

Preserve whatever information you received—the telephone number, voicemail, text message, email, purported badge number or payment instructions—but do not use the information provided by the caller to verify the caller's identity.

If you genuinely believe the DEA may be trying to contact you, independently contact the DEA using contact information obtained from an official government source.

Most importantly, do not allow the urgency of the call to make the decision for you. These scams work because the words “DEA,” “controlled substances,” “federal investigation” and “arrest” understandably get a healthcare practitioner's attention.

Take a moment. Think about what you are being told. That moment of lucid thought may save you a great deal of money—and a great deal of unnecessary anxiety.

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KEEP THIS BY YOUR PHONE

If someone claiming to be from the DEA calls about your license, NPI number, DEA registration or controlled substances:

STOP. Do not act because the caller says the matter is urgent.

DO NOT PAY. DEA will not demand payment, gift cards, wire transfers or electronic payment over the telephone.

DO NOT PROVIDE INFORMATION. Do not give the caller banking, Social Security or other sensitive personal information.

SAVE THE INFORMATION. Preserve the telephone number, voicemail, texts, emails, badge number and any payment instructions.

VERIFY INDEPENDENTLY. If you are concerned the contact could be legitimate, obtain DEA contact information independently from an official government source—not from the caller.

For additional information, see the DEA's [Scam Alert](#) at [DEA.gov](#)

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[Jason Winn is a Partner and registered lobbyist at Panza Mauer practicing in the areas of administrative, civil, legislative, and governmental affairs. An accomplished speaker, Winn frequently lectures across Florida on the laws and rules impacting health care practitioners. He has served as general counsel for the Florida Prescription Drug Monitoring Program, Florida Osteopathic Medical Association, Florida Podiatric Medical Association, the Sheriff's Offices in Gadsden and Wakulla, and the Florida Hearing Society of which he is also the Executive Director. Throughout his career, Jason has represented local governments, law enforcement agencies, healthcare professionals, and professional associations in complex regulatory, employment, and governmental matters. Panza Maurer is a Florida-based law firm with offices in Fort Lauderdale, Miami, and Tallahassee, representing businesses, regulated industries, institutions, and governmental entities in complex administrative, regulatory, procurement, litigation, and governmental affairs matters.]

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