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By Nina Youngstrom

◆ Banner Health has agreed to pay \$18 million to settle false claims allegations that 12 of its hospitals in Arizona and Colorado billed for inpatient admissions that should have been billed as outpatient or observation, the Department of Justice (DOJ) said April 12. According to the settlement, DOJ alleged that from Nov. 1, 2007, through Dec. 31, 2016, Banner Health billed Medicare for inpatient procedures when the length of stay was one day or less; “When the patients on whose behalf the claims were submitted to Medicare were not transferred from or transferred or discharged to another acute-care facility, did not leave the Banner Health hospital to which they originally presented against medical advice, and did not die while in a Banner Health hospital; and the claims were billed and paid under Medicare Part A....” The false claims lawsuit was initiated by a whistleblower, Cecilia Guardiola, a former Banner employee. The complaint says she “was hired by Banner Health as its Corporate Director, Clinical Documentation. The position required Ms. Guardiola to observe and evaluate compliance efforts at multiple Banner hospitals and throughout the Banner Health corporate system.” A woman with the same name who was described the same way in the complaint and in a *Washington Times* article was the whistleblower in the \$9.5 million false claims settlement in 2016 with Renown Health, which operates Renown Regional Medical Center in Nevada, according to multiple news articles. Visit <https://tinyurl.com/y7cnhk5f>.

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