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Woman indicted as drug mill queen

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A Detroit woman, who law enforcement officials say masterminded a nationwide drug ring, was indicted Thursday in U.S. District Court on drug trafficking charges along with 22 other people.

The woman, Nellie Bell Kassim, 42, is named in the indictment as the organizer of a ring of doctors, pharmacists and drug users who ran what investigators called a "prescription mill." The ring's activities, investigators said, also included selling drugs in Washington, D.C., and New York.

TWO DOCTORS, five pharmacies, seven pharmacists or drugstore owners and 13 persons identified as "employe conspirators" were charged with conspiracy with intent to deliver drugs. In addition, Kassim was charged with "engaging in a continuing criminal enterprise" since January 1979. The latter charge carries a sentence of 10 years to life upon conviction.

Kassim

Leonard Gilman, U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of Michigan, handled the arraignment of Kassim and asked U.S. District Magistrate Lynn Hooe to set a $100,000 bond for Kassim. Gilman said Kassim was as much a risk as convicted heroin dealer George Casey, who was sentenced Thursday to 10 years in prison. Casey was re-captured after he disappeared after his guilty plea on the same criminal enterprise charge Kassim is now charged with. A Detroit bondsman who guaranteed Casey's $500,000 bond is appealing an order to forfeit the bond to U.S. District Court.

"The drugs that are alleged (in the Kassim indictment) are as serious as the distribution of heroin in the city of Detroit," Gilman said, adding that the medical clinics operated by Kassim were "no more than 'script mills.'"

HOOE SET a $15,000 surety bond for Kassim, who later put up 10 percent and was released. Kassim was arrested in a Southfield home Wednesday night by federal Drug Enforcement Administration agents.

The two doctors charged in the 12-page indictment are Alan Devore Fields, D.O., and Ryan Krebs, M.D. Krebs is also awaiting trial on related federal drug charges.

Krebs, 28, who federal in-

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vestigators said operated at least two medical clinics with Kassim, was charged earlier this year with illegally prescribing drugs after writing four prescriptions — totaling 200 tablets — for Talwin, a painkiller, and selling them to an undercover FBI agent. Talwin is commonly mixed with various antihistamines or decongestants and injected to give an effect similar to heroin.

In addition to Talwin, the indictment charges, the group was trafficking in at least eight other prescription drugs ranging from tranquilizers such as Valium to opiate painkillers such as Dilaudid. One of the drugs named — the amphetamine Desoxyn — is known on Detroit streets as "the Cadillac of speed."

THE INDICTMENT cites 55 different incidents during the past three years in which Kassim and the others set up a network of clinics throughout Detroit and had Fields and Krebs write prescriptions for the drugs. Then, according to the indictment, Kassim and the others would sell the prescriptions to drug users or use the prescriptions to acquire large quantities of drugs which were then transported throughout the country.

At least 500,000 prescription pills were involved, according to the indictment, which charges that Kassim "and others" delivered drugs during at least two trips to Washington, D.C., and one to Jamaica, N.Y., during 1980.

The pharmacies named in the indictment include Scotch Castle Pharmacy Inc., Kwality Prescription Services Inc., Gilfix Pharmacy Inc., Unarex of Plymouth and Unarex of Dearborn, both doing business as Motor City Prescription Center.

Attorney Leonard S. Herman of Southfield appeared on behalf of pharmacist Melvin Boyer. Herman, who said he would also represent the pharmacies named in the indictment, said Boyer was a "principal" in three of the four pharmacies.

Besides Boyer, people identified in the indictment as pharmacists and/or owners of the drugstores include Bernard Levine, Stanley Iczkovitz , Alvin Fisch, Gandhi Lingamneni, Anthony Meolig and David Goldman.

LAST APRIL, Kassim said she paid the expenses of Lingamneni to travel to Washington, D.C., where Kassim's sister, Nancy McInnis, was on trial on a charge of possession of several thousand tablets of Preludin, a stimulate. The drugs were found in a suitcase she picked up at Washington National Airport.

Lingamneni testified that he knew Kassim well and had filled numerous prescriptions for clinics she operated. Lingamneni testified that all the prescriptions seemed legitimate to him.

McInnis, 30, was acquitted by the federal court jury.

IN SEVERAL interviews with the Free Press after the March 5, 1981, slaying of Kassim's sister, Mozell Barber, Kassim denied any involvement in trafficking in prescription drugs.

"Pills are not my deal," she said. "They're too slow for me. I tell the police, 'You never get me with those pills.' The police, they just tickles me."

Kassim, who told the Free Press she was rich, claimed she got her money in a ticket scam with several airlines during the early 1970s and had stored the money in milk bottles until the statute of limitations expired.

"I'm a hustler, honey," she said.

THE TWO doctors and seven pharmacists were released on personal bonds by Magistrate Hooe pending May 18 preliminary hearings.

Indicted persons identified as "employe conspirators" include Shirley Bradley Danner, Maggie Curry, Linda Ricks, Ella Tipton, Cassandra Bell, Curtis Hicks, L.C. Turman, John Zellner, John Parker, Sam Fields Jr., Daisy Evelyn Madison, Robert Lee Elliot and Joseph Williams. The indictment did not indicate their residences.

All but Bell, who is still being sought, were arrested and released on personal bonds pending May 18 preliminary hearings.