

Nurses at Atlanta VA removed over fake diploma scheme [Markie Martin](#)

([NewsNation](#)) — Three nurses [were removed](#) from a Veterans Affairs hospital in Atlanta following a [federal investigation](#) into a scheme that awarded fake nursing diplomas to thousands of people across the country.

In a statement to NewsNation, Department of Veterans Affairs press secretary Terrence Hayes said the nurses were removed “within days” of the VA learning about the scheme.

“Their removal is very unfortunate but patient safety is and must be our primary responsibility at VA,” Hayes said.

Monique Franklin recently went to that [VA hospital in Atlanta](#) with her father for routine blood work. She said he was paired with a nurse who missed his veins so badly the appointment ended up being an all-day event.

“The first thing that came to my mind was maybe that’s what happened to my dad,” Franklin said about the experience. “I mean, we were there like six or seven hours. And my dad, it was swollen, it was really huge, and he said he was in pain.”

She now wonders if he was in the hands of one of those fake nurses. “You’re scared to trust people, you’re scared to trust the nurses because you don’t know if they’re legit or not,” she said.

The Georgia Secretary of State’s Office identified 22 people in the state who received fake diplomas, and 17 of those who obtained their license. Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger said those 17 people have been asked to return their licenses.

“We are going to proceed posthaste and make sure they’re brought to justice and penalties are paid,” Raffensperger said. “They will not be practicing nursing here in the state of Georgia.”

The findings were announced last week in what the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services dubbed Operation Nightingale.

A ring of 25 people tied to three South Florida nursing schools have been charged, accused of selling [more than 7,600 fake diplomas](#) and transcripts to aspiring nurses who sometimes forked over between \$10,000 and \$15,000.

“These individuals basically catered to folks that wanted to shortcut,” said Omar Perez Aybar, a special agent in the DHSS. “They never attended class, never attended a clinical, the work that they needed to do.”

Officials said people who acquired the bogus credentials used them to qualify to sit for the national nursing board exam. Upon successful completion of the exam, they became eligible to obtain licensure in various states.

Federal officials have found about 2,400 of the students passed their licensing exams, and so far investigators have not found any harm caused to patients. Many are expected to lose their certification but not to be criminally charged.