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FBI agents search offices of medical equipment maker

By ALEXANDRA ZAYAS

Published March 9, 2007

TAMPA - The FBI on Thursday searched Axiom Worldwide, one of the nation's largest manufacturers of high-priced, high-technology medical equipment to treat lower back pain.

FBI officials did not offer details on the raid at 9423 Corporate Lakes Drive.

The multimillion dollar spinal decompression industry's marketing tactics are under investigation nationwide, according to an industry newsletter, the Anesthesia & Pain Coder's Pink Sheet.

Medicare and many major insurers won't pay for the expensive machines, and doctors who buy them have claimed that manufacturers deliberately mislead customers to think treatment is reimbursable, even suggesting inappropriate procedure codes to use when billing insurers. When doctors get in trouble, they blame manufacturers. The manufacturers have denied the charges.

Axiom Worldwide attorney L. Joseph Shaheen Jr. would not comment on specifics of the search, or confirm that it involved marketing tactics.

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"We think that the matter was precipitated by competitors, who are disgruntled with our client, and beyond that I don't think it would be appropriate to comment," he said.

Times staff writer Kris Hundley contributed to this report. Alexandra Zayas can be reached at 813-226-3354 or azayas@sptimes.com.

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