

# Like a video game that you can't lose

**By her own admission, Margaret Tsui is a curious person, which isn't a bad trait to have considering her role as Investigator in the NYC Office of the Medicaid Inspector General (OMIG), where she takes deep dives into potential cases of fraud, waste, and abuse. While many of her leads come from OMIG directors and other colleagues, sometimes her own curiosity is enough to get the wheels turning.**

"I was reading a newspaper article about a house being raided and a number of the residents were arrested for selling prescription drugs," she says. "I wondered if Medicaid was paying for their drug habits or illegal dealings." Margaret's next step was to check the pharmacies where the prescriptions were filled, starting with one that was notable because it had only been opened for about six months. "I hit the jackpot," she recalls. Over 30% of the scripts filled here were for Oxycodone—more than 80,000 pills in a six-month span—and two or three of the recipients in custody had used this particular pharmacy. (Oxycodone is a Schedule 2 narcotic analgesic used to relieve severe pain.) By drilling further into the claims data Margaret identified one prescribing provider that stood out like a sore thumb, no pun intended: better than 90% of this physician's scripts filled at this pharmacy were for Oxycodone. This information resulted in the investigation, arrest and indictment of the prescribing doctor earlier this year.

Not bad for a day's work, however it would have actually taken Margaret nearly two man-hour weeks to pull enough information from the OMIG data warehouse to launch the investigation. "I needed to gather more claim data in order to identify more of the top prescribing providers, but it would have taken too long and to run data from the data warehouse on every pharmacy, prescriber and recipient," she points out. "It would not have been practical. So I could only focus on a few areas."

Not long after this experience, Margaret and her OMIG colleagues began using a powerful software solution developed by Salient Management Company to quickly expose incidents of potential Medicaid fraud, waste, and abuse. In fact, it was during the Salient training program that Margaret realized just how much more she could accomplish with this new tool—and how much faster she could get there. "Salient lets me look at an issue from every angle to get to root cause—by provider, recipient, procedure code, location, prescription. Anything. I can do a really deep dive in a fraction of the time it took me in the data warehouse," she explains.

During one of her early Salient training classes Margaret actually revisited the Oxycodone project to investigate beyond the names of the people in the newspaper article and look at all Oxycodone

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prescriptions by county. “I saw that one county, with a population of less than 500,000 people, was number one in New York State in terms of Medicaid-paid Oxycodone, going from \$494,000 in 2008 to \$1.1 million in 2010.” The number of Oxycodone pills dispensed during the same period increased from 500,000 to 1.4 million. It came as no surprise that the house that was raided originally was located in this particular county. “It makes a really strong case that there is an Oxycodone epidemic in this community, and Medicaid is being used—or abused—in this activity. I was amazed at how easily I was able to get a complete list of providers writing Oxycodone scripts in this county within a few minutes. We now have more provider names that warrant further investigation.

“The impact of Salient is that we are able to detect potential fraud in an expedient manner. I strongly believe that using Salient will help to proactively identify problem areas. As an Investigator in the NY City office I use Salient every minute of every day. Its speed and ease of use lets me view data from new perspectives and uncover additional issues for potential investigation. Salient is like a video game, but you win no matter what because you always find the bad guys.”

(Editor’s Note: Margaret worked for OMIG’s Division of Medicaid Investigation at the time of this interview, but now works for the Division of Medicaid Audit. She is still in the Manhattan office.)

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–Margaret Tsui, OMIG, Investigator  
in the NYC Office of the Medicaid  
Inspector General

For more information on the Salient solution for Medicaid and other public sector applications, please contact Fahad Rahman at [frahman@salient.com](mailto:frahman@salient.com) or at 571-222-4250.