ERISA COMPLAINT

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

- 1. This Court has subject matter jurisdiction over this action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1331, because this action arises under the laws of the United States. This action is brought under 29 U.S.C. section 1332, because the action seeks to enforce rights under the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 ("ERISA"), and pursuant to 28 U.S.C. section 1367, because the state law claims are so related to the federal claims that they form part of the same case or controversy.
- 2. This Court is the proper venue for this action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1391(b) because a substantial part of the events or omissions giving rise to the claims alleged herein occurred in this Judicial District, and because Kaiser Foundation Health Plan, Inc. ("Kaiser") is doing business in this judicial district, in that it covers employees residing in this judicial district. The medical claims at issue herein are also specifically administered in this judicial district. Thus, venue is proper in this judicial district pursuant to 29 U.S.C. §1132(e)(2) (special venue rules applicable to ERISA actions)

THE PARTIES

- 3. Plaintiff was, at all times relevant, a resident of the County of San Diego, State of California, and is a licensed medical doctor practicing in San Diego County.
- Plaintiff is a licensed physician and is an emergency trauma physician specialist. Plaintiff has performed and continues to perform emergency medical services for Defendants' members on a non-contracted basis, sometimes referred to as an "out-of-network" or "non-participating" provider.
- 5. Defendant is a health insurance plan licensed to do business in California, and provided health insurance coverage to an individual treated by Dr. Ghosh.

GENERAL ALLEGATIONS

- 6. The emergency health care system in California is in critical condition. The demand for emergency care has rapidly increased and will continue to grow in the future. According to a recent evaluation of the emergency care environment in the United States by the American College of Emergency Physicians, California continues to lag behind a majority of states in providing access to adequate emergency care. In order to continue to provide emergency health care services, providers depend on the prompt and full payment of rendered emergency services by health insurers.
- 7. Plaintiff ("Dr. Ghosh") is a licensed physician and is an emergency trauma physician specialist. Dr. Ghosh has performed and continues to perform emergency medical services for Defendants' members on a non-contracted basis, sometimes referred to as an "out-of-network" or "non-participating" provider.
- 8. Under the federal Emergency Medical Treatment and Active Labor Act ("EMTALA"), Social Security Act section 1867(a), and California Health and Safety Code section 1317, individuals who believe that they are suffering a medical emergency have the right to seek treatment at the nearest emergency room, and hospitals which have emergency rooms. Providers, like Dr. Ghosh, have a statutory duty to provide emergency services and are to all individual regardless of the patients ability to pay or their possession or type of insurance benefits.
- Therefore, by law, when an insured of Defendant presents themselves to an emergency room, the provider on call is legally obligated to treat that person without regard to the person's ability to pay and without first obtaining insurance verification or authorization to provide the treatment. Provider cannot refuse to provide emergency treatment to one of Defendant's insureds simply because Kaiser is non-contracted with the provider and the individual does not have the personal resources to pay for such emergency care.

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10. Providers can either enter into an agreement with Defendants or th	.ey
can provide services to Defendants' subscribers without any contract with	
Defendants governing that relationship. Participating, or in-network providers,	are
physicians who have signed a contract with a particular managed care entity an	d
receive reimbursement of eligible charges directly from that entity. Participating	1g
providers agree to provide healthcare services to plan enrollees at reduced rates	in
exchange for access to the plan's patient base, among other things.	

- 11. Out-of-network providers, by contrast, do not have a signed contract with a particular managed care entity and therefore may collect their full, non-emergency charges directly from patients at the time of service and are not required to accept reduced rates for procedures performed.
- Dr. Ghosh is not contracted with Kaiser for any of the relevant claims 12. at issue in this action. California law requires that physicians provide emergency medical services to patients regardless of the patient's insurance status or ability to pay; the physician cannot turn the emergency patient away without service. See Cal. Health & Saf. Code § 1317 Bell v. Blue Cross of California, 131 Cal.App.4th 211 (2005). As a result of this requirement, California law thus mandates that health plans must cover payment for emergency room services provided to its members by out-of-network providers at least until the patient is stabilized. Cal. Health & Saf. Code § 1371.4; Prospect Medical Group, Inc. v. Northridge Emergency Medical Group, 45 Cal.4th 497, 504 (2009) ("Subdivision (b) of section 1371.4 was enacted in 1994 to impose a mandatory duty upon health care plans to reimburse noncontracting providers for emergency medical services."). The amount of those payments must be determined as set forth in the California Code of Regulations, Title 28, section 1300.71 (setting forth payment must be at usual and customary rate ("UCR")) and the minimum claims payment and dispute resolution standards to ensure compliance with the Knox-Keene Act's time requirements for claims reimbursement). Children's Hospital Central California v. Blue Cross of California,

F065603, 2014 WL 2590823 (Cal. Ct. App. June 10, 2014). Defendants may deny payment only if they reasonably determine that services were never performed. 28 C.C.R. § 1300.71. Thus, California law provides a sturdy backbone to California's emergency medical care system and provides the crux of an important matter of California public policy. These statutory and regulatory requirements legally bind the relationship between Dr. Ghosh and Kaiser. Furthermore, this relationship has been and will remain active and ongoing as Dr. Ghosh continues to render emergency medical care in California.

- performing complex surgeries of the head, neck and skull base. Dr. Ghosh performs surgical procedures much of which is induced by trauma and requires complicated, expensive, and highly-skilled treatment resulting from a decade of formal education, medical residency and years of medical practice. The complexity of Dr. Ghosh's work is compounded when such services are rendered in an emergency context. Based upon the legal requirements set forth above in California, Dr. Ghosh rendered the emergency medical services referenced herein and reasonably relied upon Kaiser to properly pay for mose services as required by law.
- 14. The UCR amount is the maximum amount the insurer will consider eligible for reimbursement to non-participating providers who are outside of their network. UCR is supposedly determined based on a review of the prevailing charges made by peer physicians for a particular medical or health service by a specific type of physician within a specific community or geographical area. However, UCR is typically set by Defendant and other insurance carriers using various internal and external data sources.
- 15. Defendant is obligated to pay emergency doctors, like Plaintiff, their usual, customary and reasonable rates for medical services. Nevertheless, Defendant pays non-contracting emergency doctors, including Plaintiff, arbitrary

amounts that are substantially below the cost, value and common range for the services rendered.

- 16. Plaintiff provided emergency services to a Kaiser insured, Kenneth D. 1 Kenneth D. is a 25 year-old man who, on November 15, 2010, fell from a great height and suffered a severe L2 burst fracture, as well as a hemorrhagic contusion of the brain. Kenneth D. was rushed to and admitted at the emergency room at Scripps Memorial Hospital in La Jolla, California. Plaintiff, an employee of San Diego NeuroTrauma Associates, Inc., is on staff at Scripps Hospital and due to his expertise, he was asked by Scripps to perform emergency back and cranial surgery on Kenneth D. Plaintiff was not a contracted provider with Kaiser.
- 17. On November 15, 2010, Plaintiff performed a procedure to place a pressure and oxygen monitor in Kenneth Des skull to monitor his intracranial pressure in the post-injury period.
- 18. On November 19, 2010, Plaintiff performed four additional emergency surgeries on Kenneth D. in order to treat patient's declining cerebral oxygen levels and marked rise in intracranial pressure. All four procedures took approximately 15 hours to complete.
- 19. Plaintiff was billed \$126,288.86 for services rendered prior to, including and after emergency surgeries performed on November 15, 2010, November 19, 2010, November 26, 2010, and November 30, 2010. To this date, Kaiser has only paid Plaintiff's neurosurgeon \$43,522.49. Kenneth D. still remains responsible and would have to pay out-of-pocket for the outstanding balance of \$82,766.37, the difference between the amount billed to and the amount paid by

¹ For privacy reasons, the name of Kenneth D. is not set forth herein in full. However, Kaiser has identified the patient via his Medical Record Number: 10268393. If additional information is required by defendant to identify Kenneth D. and/or the services provided to him by Plaintiff, such information will be disclosed to Defendant upon its request.

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Kaiser for the emergency surgeries performed on Kenneth D.

FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION

Enforcement Under 29 U.S.C. § 1132(a)(1)(B)

For Failure to Pay ERISA Plan Benefits, Enforcement and Clarification of Rights, Prejudgment and Postjudgment Interest, and Attorneys' Fees and Costs

- Plaintiff incorporates by reference all preceding paragraphs 1 through 20. 19, as though fully set forth herein.
- This claim is alleged by Plaintiff for relief in connection with claims 21. for treatment rendered to patient Kenneth D., who was covered by a health benefits plan governed by ERISA. This is a claim to recover benefits, enforce rights and clarify rights to benefits under 29 U.S. (2) 1132(a)(1)(B).
- Plaintiff is a non-assignee provider and third party beneficiary to the 22. health insurance contract created between Kenneth D. and Kaiser. Only ERISA beneficiaries have standing to assert a section 1132(a)(1)(B) claim. ERISA defines "beneficiary" as "a person designated by a participant, or by the terms of an employee benefit plan, who is or may become entitled to a benefit thereunder." 29 U.S.C. 1002(8). The term, "beneficiary," has been broadly construed to include more than just "spouses and dependents" of participants. Peterson v. Am. Life & Health Ins. Co., 48 F.3d 404, 409 (9th Cir. 1995). Instead, "beneficiary" means "any person designated to receive benefits from a policy that is part of an ERISA plan" by the terms of the plan itself or by a participant." Id.
- Plaintiff is informed and believes that Kaiser is the plan administrator and therefore is a proper defendant for this claim.
- 24. Plaintiff is informed and believes that Kaiser received benefit claims, evaluated and processed those claims, made initial benefit determinations, made and

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administered benefit payments, and handled providers appeals of benefit determinations.

- Plaintiff is informed and believes that Kaiser employs improper 25. methods to calculate UCR rates when determining how much to reimburse emergency providers who render services to their insureds.
- 26. Kaiser breached ERISA plan provisions at issue by under-pricing and underpaying Plaintiff the out-of-network benefits covered by Kenneth D.'s ERISA plan. Kaiser relied on a claims payment system to calculate UCR which arbitrarily, systematically and improperly reduces and underpays benefits owed to physicians, like Plaintiff, for emergency services rendered to its insureds.
- Plaintiff exhausted all administrative remedies available to him, by 27. appealing every adverse claim determination made by Kaiser in the normal course of business. Despite Plaintiff's exhaustion of the appeals process under the terms of patient's ERISA plans, Kaiser failed to establish and follow reasonable claims procedures as required by ERISA.
- Despite Plaintiff's appeals, such appeals and further administrative 28. efforts would be futile and meaningless. Kaiser failed to process claims submitted by Plaintiff in a manner consistent with ERISA regulations. See 29 C.F.R. § 2560.503-1. Kaiser refused to adequately explain its benefit determinations. In letters sent to Plaintiff, Kaiser provided no methodology or reasonable explanation for determining how it arrived at paying non-contracted claims at such an unreasonable and low amount. By steadfastly applying and systematically relying on its flawed data and methodologies, Kaiser rendered the administrative appeal process a futile and meaningless endeavor.
- 29. In light of Kaiser's failure to comply with ERISA regulations, Plaintiff's claims are "deemed exhausted." Furthermore, Plaintiff's administrative and arbitration remedies are exhausted for the reasons alleged above, including, but not limited to, the fact that Kaiser relied on invalid data and claims processing

 systems to determine payment to Plaintiff, a nonparticipating provider. Exhaustion would have been futile given that Kaiser continues to employ and rely on improper methodologies which systematically underpay claims to nonparticipating providers who render emergency procedures to its insureds.

- 30. The Plaintiff is informed and believes and thereupon alleges that in underpaying reimbursement for medically necessary treatment, Kaiser failed to comply with its policy provision requiring it to cover usual, reasonable and customary rates for the provision of emergency services. Rather, Kaiser underpaid Plaintiff on the grounds that the medically necessary services provided exceeded the UCR rates determined by Kaiser.
- 31. As a proximate result of the denial of reimbursement for services rendered to Kaiser's insured and due to Plaintiff, Plaintiff has been damaged in the amount of a substantial majority of the medical bills incurred, in a total sum to be proven at the time of trial.
- 32. As a further direct and proximate result of this underpayment of Plaintiff's provision of emergency services, Plaintiff in pursuing this action has been required to incur attorneys' costs and fees. Pursuant to 29 U.S.C. §1132(g)(1), Plaintiff is entitled to have such fees and costs paid by Defendant.
- 33. Plaintiff is entitled to recover benefits due and enforce his rights to benefits under the terms of the plan under 29 U.S.C. §1132(a)(1)(B).

SECOND CAUSE OF ACTION

For Breach of Implied-In-Fact Contract – Emergency Claims

- 34. Plaintiff incorporates all allegations set forth in the above paragraphs 1 through 33, as though fully set forth herein.
- 35. Under EMTALA and California Health & Safety Code section 1371.4, Kaiser was and is required to reimburse Dr. Ghosh for emergency medical services rendered to its member, Kenneth D.

- 37. Plaintiff is informed and believes that Kenneth D. obtained such a Policy with Kaiser for the specific purpose of (1) ensuring that Kenneth D. would have access to medically necessary treatment and emergency room services at health care facilities like Scripps Hospital, and would have access to emergency treatment of the type provided by Plaintiff and (2) ensuring that Kaiser would pay for the health care expenses incurred by Kenneth D. Kaiser knew or reasonably should have known that any insured would seek emergency medical treatment at the hospital in closest proximity to them, such as Kenneth D. did with Scripps Hospital, and that Scripps would utilize the medical services of expert physicians such as Plaintiff.
- 38. By virtue of the obligations imposed by Health & Safety Code section 1371.4, there exists and existed an implied-in-law contract between Dr. Ghosh and Kaiser when Dr. Ghosh provided emergency medical services to Kenneth D. at Scripps Hospital. This implied-in-law contract requires Kaiser to reimburse Dr. Ghosh for emergency medical services rendered to Kenneth D., Kaiser's member.
- 39. Despite Kaiser's obligation to reimburse Dr. Ghosh, Kaiser has refused to pay and continues to refuse to pay Dr. Ghosh for the whole of the sums owed to Plaintiff for the treatment services provided to Kenneth D.
- As a result of the foregoing breach, Plaintiff has been damaged by Kaiser by at least \$82,766.37. Accordingly, there is now due, owing, an unpaid sum of \$82,766.37, plus statutory interest thereon.

THIRD CAUSE OF ACTION

For Quantum Meruit

41. Plaintiff incorporates all allegations set forth in the above paragraphs 1 through 40, as though fully set forth herein.

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42.	Quantum meruit is an equitable remedy implied by law under which a
plaintiff v	ho had rendered services benefitting the defendants may recover the
reasonable	e value of those services.
43	In November 2010. Plaintiff rendered emergency medical services to

- In November 2010, Plaintiff rendered emergency medical services to Kenneth D., who is insured with Kaiser. Kaiser knew these services were being provided to their insured, Kenneth D., and did not contest these services being provided. Kenneth D. accepted each of the services provided by Plaintiff.
- Under California law, Kaiser is required to reimburse Plaintiff at a 44. quantum meruit rate for all emergency services rendered to its enrollees. The quantum meruit amount is determined according to the full charges that would be billed by Plaintiff in the absence of contractual rates.
- The quantum meruit rate for the medical treatment Plaintiff provided to 45. Kenneth D. \$82,766.37. This amount represents the amount Plaintiff receives from other health plans for similar treatment provided to their members. Plaintiff has submitted statements to Kaise for this amount, and has made repeated demands that it be paid for the medical treatment provided to Kenneth D.
- Kaiser has underpaid and continues to refuse to pay Plaintiff for the whole of the sums owed to Plaintiff for the treatment services provided to Kenneth D. Accordingly, there is now due, owing, an unpaid sum of \$82,766.37, plus statutory interest thereon.

FOURTH CAUSE OF ACTION

For Unjust Enrichment

- 47. Plaintiff incorporates all allegations set forth in the above paragraphs 1 through 46, as though fully set forth herein.
- 48. Kaiser has received from Kenneth D. insurance premium benefits having a reasonable value, which they may not justly retain, and therefore have been unjustly enriched in a sum according to proof at trial.

49. As a direct and proximate result of Kaiser's wrongful conduct as alleged herein, and as further alleged in the Prayer below, Plaintiff has been damaged in an amount of \$82,766.37, together with prejudgment interest thereon at the maximum rate provided by law.

FIFTH CAUSE OF ACTION

For Violation of California Health & Safety Code section 1371.35

- 50. Plaintiff incorporates all allegations set forth in the above paragraphs 1 through 49, as though fully set forth herein.
- 51. The Knox-Keene Act further requires that "[a] health care service plan, including a specialized health care service plan, shall reimburse each complete claim, or portion thereof, whether in state or out of state, as soon as practical, but no later than 30 working days after receipt of the complete claim by the health care service plan, or if the health care service plan is a health maintenance organization, 45 working days after receipt of the complete claim by the health care service plan." Cal. Health & Safety Code § 371.35(a) (emphasis added). Alternatively, "a plan may contest or deny a claim, or portion thereof, by notifying the claimant, in writing, that the claim is contested or denied, within 30 working days after receipt of the claim by the health care service plan, or if the health care service plan is a health maintenance organization, working days after receipt of the claim by the health care service plan." *Id.* (emphasis added).
- 52. As alleged herein, Kaiser violated California Health and Safety Code section 1371.35 by their actions which include, but are not limited to, failing to reimburse Plaintiff for Kenneth D.'s medically necessary surgical services within 45-working days after receipt of the claim.
- 53. As a direct and proximate result of Kaiser's wrongful conduct as alleged herein, and as further alleged in the Prayer below, Plaintiff is entitled to the greater of \$15 per year per claim or interest at the rate of 15% per claim beginning

with the first calendar day after the 45-working-day period. Cal. Health & Safety Code § 1371.35(b).

SIXTH CAUSE OF ACTION

For Declaratory Relief

- 54. Plaintiff incorporates all allegations set forth in the above paragraphs 1 through 53, as though fully set forth herein.
- 55. A dispute has arisen between Plaintiff and Kaiser as to the amount that Kaiser is required to pay Plaintiff for the medically necessary services provided by Plaintiff to Kenneth D. Kaiser contends that it over Plaintiff no additional monies in connection with emergency services provided to Kenneth D. Plaintiff contends that it is entitled to receive payment in the amount of \$82,766.37, plus statutory interest, for the emergency services provided to Kenneth D.
- 56. Plaintiff desires a judicial determination by the Court that Kaiser is required to pay Plaintiff for the emergency services provided to Kenneth D. at a reasonable rate, not the rate that Kaiser has improperly determined is owed for the treatment provided
- 57. Such a declaration is necessary and appropriate at this time so that Plaintiff and Kaiser may ascertain their rights, duties and obligations concerning the medical services that Plaintiff provided to Kenneth D.

REQUEST FOR RELIEF

Wherefore, Plaintiff prays for judgment against Defendant as follows:

1. Pursuant to 29 U.S.C. § 1132(a)(1)(b), a Judgment requiring Defendant to immediately reimburse at an adequate level medical benefits due and owing under the Plan and, specifically, to reimburse in full Plaintiff's claims for surgical back procedures by his treating neurosurgeon and all related medical benefits related thereto;

2.	Pursuant to 29 U.S.C. § 1132(g), payment of all costs and attorneys
fees incurre	ed in pursuing this action;

- 3. For compensatory damages in an amount of not less than \$82,766.37, plus statutory interest;
- 4. For restitution in an amount of not less than \$82,766.37, plus statutory interest;
- 5. For a declaration that Kaiser is obligated to pay Plaintiff all monies owed for services rendered to Kenneth D.;
 - 6. For all attorneys' fees and costs incurred in bringing this action;
 - 7. For such other and further relief as the Court deems just and proper.

DATED: November 19, 2014

KANTOR & KANTOR, LLP

By: /s/ Glenn R. Kantor
Glenn R. Kantor
Timothy J. Rozelle
Attorney for Plaintiff
Sanjay Ghosh, M.D.

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JS 44 (Rev. 12/12)

CIVIL COVER SHEET

'14CV2785 JLS MDD

The JS 44 civil cover sheet and the information contained herein neither replace nor supplement the filing and service of pleadings or other papers as required by law, except as provided by local rules of court. This form, approved by the Judicial Conference of the United States in September 1974, is required for the use of the Clerk of Court for the purpose of initiating the civil docket sheet. (SEE INSTRUCTIONS ON NEXT PAGE OF THIS FORM.)

I. (a) PLAINTIFFS SANJAY GHOSH, M.D. (b) County of Residence of First Listed Plaintiff San Diego (EXCEPT IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES)			DEFENDANTS			
			KAISER FOUNDATION HEALTH PLAN, INC. County of Residence of First Listed Defendant (IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES ONLY) NOTE: IN LAND CONDEMNATION CASES, USE THE LOCATION OF THE TRACT OF LAND INVOLVED.			
II. BASIS OF JURISDI	CTION (Place an "X" in One Box Only)			RINCIPALPARTIES	Place an "X" in One Box for Plaintiff	
C 1 U.S. Government Plaintiff	3 Federal Question (U.S. Government Not a Party)		(Far Diversity Cases Only) PT en of This State	/ / / / •		
D 2 U.S. Government Defendant	1 4 Diversity (Indicate Citizenship of Parties in Item III)		en of Another State	of Business In A		
The state of the s			oreign Country			
IV. NATURE OF SUIT	(Place an "X" in One Box Only)	1 440			BEERNALDS AND	
110 Insurance 120 Marine 130 Miller Act 140 Negotiable Instrument 150 Recovery of Overpayment & Enforcement of Judgment 151 Medicare Act 152 Recovery of Defaulted Student Loans (Excludes Veterans) 153 Recovery of Overpayment of Veteran's Benefits 160 Stockholders' Suits 190 Other Contract 195 Contract Product Liability 196 Franchise	PERSONAL INJURY PERSONAL INJURY 310 Airplane 365 Personal Injury 515 Airplane Product Liability 970duct Liability 1320 Assault, Libel & Pharmaceutical	RY 0 6 6 9 7 9 7 9 7 9 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1	25 Drug Rolland Seizure (Property 21 USC 881 90 Oules	422 Appeal 28 USC 158 423 Withdrawal 28 USC 157 28	375 False Claims Act 400 State Reapportionment 410 Antitrust 430 Banks and Banking 450 Commerce 460 Deportation 470 Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations 480 Consumor Credit	
	moved from D 3 Remanded from Appellate Court Cite the U.S. Civil Statute under which you 29 U.S.C. \$ 1132/a)(1)(B)		pened Anothe (specify)	r District Litigation		
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VII. REQUESTED IN COMPLAINT:	☐ CHECK IF THIS IS A CLASS ACTIO UNDER RULE 23, F.R.Cv.P.	N D	DEMAND S	JURY DEMAND:	if demanded in complaint: O Yes Mo	
VIII. RELATED CASI	E(S) (See instructions): JUDGE			DOCKET NUMBER		
DATE 11/21/2014	signature of at /s/ Glenn R.		OF RECORD			
FOR OFFICE USE ONLY	/s/ Glenn R.	rvanior		······································		
RECEIPT # A!	MOUNT APPLYING IFP		JUDGE	MAG. JUI	OGE	