

November 27, 2009

STENEHJEM ANNOUNCES PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE SUMMIT

BISMARCK- Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem today announced that he is presenting a Prescription Drug Abuse summit to focus attention on the state's fastest growing drug problem. A one-day conference will be held in Bismarck on December 8, and in Fargo on December 9, 2009.

"In recent years, a number of online pharmacies have been established. While many of these pharmacies are legitimate, a number of rogue online pharmacies are a source for prescription drugs dispensed without the "patient" ever having a consultation with a physician," said Stenehjem.

Earlier this year, the North Dakota Legislature passed a version of "Justin's Law," named for Justin Pearson of St. Cloud, Minnesota, who died of an overdose of Vicodin, Percocet, and OxyContin that he purchased on the Internet after filling out a brief questionnaire. The legislation targeted illegal online operations by requiring a face-to-face consultation with a prescribing medical professional.

The keynote address at the conference will be given by Dan Pearson, Justin Pearson's father.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, between 1999 and 2004, deaths from accidental drug overdose in the United States increased by 178%, with the largest increases in rural states such as North Dakota. In 2004, poisoning deaths outnumbered firearm deaths and have increased at a greater pace than firearm deaths since then.

"Prescription drugs are perceived to be less dangerous or addictive, but drug abuse is drug abuse. We need to focus attention on this problem and work together to find a solution," said Stenehjem.

The conference offers training and education opportunities to law enforcement officers, treatment and addiction counselors, social workers, doctors, and prosecutors, and will address a variety of topics ranging from addiction and treatment to prevention, as well as the prescription drug monitoring program. Also speaking at the conference are Dr. Manuel Colon of Trinity Health's Pain Management Clinic and Dr. Sarah McCullough, an Emergency room physician with St. Alexius Medical Center in Bismarck. The summit will also feature panels of treatment and addiction counselors, pharmacists, and pain management physicians.

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One of the presentations will show an undercover drug agent making a purchase from an illegal online pharmacy. Task force agents are working with local law enforcement and federal drug agents to identify and shut down these illegal operations.

The summit is free but pre-registration is required. Registration is available online only on the Attorney General's website at www.ag.nd.gov

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