

U.S. Attorney's Report to the District

The development of new prescription drugs has led to great advances in the treatment of many serious medical conditions. Unfortunately, however, the abuse of these same drugs is the nation's fastest-growing drug problem, creating a public health crisis that the Centers for Disease Control has classified as an epidemic. More Americans now die from drug overdoses than from car crashes, and prescription drug abuse is driving that upward trend.

Combatting prescription drug abuse is now a top priority with the DEA, and my office is an important part of that effort. In September, a Bakersfield doctor pleaded guilty to over-prescribing hydrocodone -- an opiate pain reliever found in medications such as Vicodin and Lortab -- for no legitimate medical purpose. Earlier this year a medical assistant from Lincoln and his associate were sentenced to prison for illegally obtaining and distributing hydrocodone. Other federal investigations into the illegal diversion of prescription drugs in this district are underway.

Young people who may not appreciate the danger of misusing powerful prescription drugs are particularly at risk. Two thirds of teens who abuse say they got prescription drugs not from a street dealer but from a friend or family member. Because the source of supply is often our own medicine cabinets, law enforcement alone cannot fully address this problem.

In an effort to raise awareness, reach young people, and connect stakeholders, my office convened a summit in Sacramento in September to address the problem of teenage prescription drug abuse. The summit brought together about 200 people, including government and law enforcement officials; educators; students; and leaders of regional non-profit organizations. One memorable part of the summit was a presentation by the parents of a teenage son who overdosed on prescription drugs. While doctors were able to save his life, he is now a quadriplegic with permanent disabilities who is unable to care for himself.

At the summit, we announced the creation of an Action Committee on Teenage Prescription Drug Abuse, with membership composed of local, state and federal governmental agencies, schools, non-profits, and other interested stakeholders. The Action Committee, which held an initial meeting late last month, is dedicated to finding practical ways to provide relevant information to educators, families, and students.

The solution to this epidemic will require our collective efforts – families, schools, communities, non-profits and government agencies alike. Together, we can save lives. For more information about what you can do to help, please visit www.drugfree.org. The White House Office of National Drug Control Policy also has a helpful website focusing on public policy responses to the problem at www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/prescription-drug-abuse.

If you would like to communicate with our office, contact the main number in Sacramento, or submit a suggestion by clicking on the button below. Thank you.

United States Attorney

Benjamin B. Wagner