



U.S. Department of Justice

*United States Attorney
District of Idaho*

WENDY J. OLSON, United States Attorney
RAFAEL M. GONZALEZ, JR., First Assistant United States Attorney
AARON N. LUCOFF, Criminal Chief
SYRENA C. HARGROVE, Civil Chief

*Washington Group Plaza IV
800 E. Park Blvd., Ste. 600
Boise, ID 83712-7788
(208) 334-1211*

NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
ON SEPTEMBER 6, 2016**

**CONTACT: WENDY J. OLSON
United States Attorney
(208) 334-1211**

The U.S. Department of Justice – of which the U.S. Attorney’s Offices, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) are a part – has designated September 19-23 as National Heroin and Opioid Awareness Week. This is why.

Idaho ranks fourth in the nation for non-medical use of prescription pain relievers for individuals 12 years of age and older. One in five high school students nationally reports misusing prescription drugs at least once in their lifetime. Each day, 44 people in the United States die from an overdose of prescription painkillers. More people now die each day from drug overdose than from motor vehicle accidents. The number of opioid prescriptions (like hydrocodone and oxycodone products) has escalated from around 76 million in 1991 to nearly 207 million in 2013. The United States is the biggest consumer of prescription painkillers, accounting for almost 100 percent of the world total for hydrocodone and 81 percent for oxycodone.

Yes, the statistics are frightening. The trend in Idaho is just as alarming. As I meet with law enforcement leaders around the state, I hear what they see: an increase in heroin use, abuse and availability. Prescription painkillers are simply synthetic heroin. Once a person is addicted to painkillers, transitioning to the use of heroin is easy. It is cheaper, and increasingly easy to find. National statistics show that 80% of new heroin abusers start with opioids. The high demand for both prescription pain killers and heroin provides a strong incentive for drug traffickers to cut these items with fentanyl, an even more potent synthetic opioid that can easily and accidentally be ingested, leading to overdose and death.

Yes, the facts are frightening. But law enforcement in Idaho is attacking this problem as vigorously as it can. At the federal level, the DEA Tactical Diversion Squad, comprised of local and federal agents, the FBI and my office have investigated and prosecuted a number of defendants who have intentionally diverted prescription drugs for unlawful uses. Most recently,

in Boise, we successfully investigated and prosecuted Michael Minas, an Eagle doctor who prescribed unreasonably high numbers of oxycodone, often without examining the patients. Evidence at trial showed that these patients became even more addicted. In Coeur d'Alene, we successfully prosecuted Rafael Beier, a Pinehurst doctor, who sold prescription painkillers to dancers in strip clubs and in parking lots, sometimes never seeing the individuals in his office. In June, as part of a federal drug task force investigation, Nampa and Boise Police officers stopped a car carrying just more than five pounds of heroin in a hidden compartment. That's a lot in a single load. Those involved face charges of possession with intent to distribute heroin.

Investigation and prosecution alone are not enough, however. The opioid and heroin crisis in this country and in Idaho is not just a law enforcement problem. It is a public health and community problem. It demands a broad array of public health and community solutions. Opioid addiction often begins not with a law-breaking doctor, but with a family medicine cabinet that still contains unused and no longer needed prescription painkillers. Proper and prompt disposal of unused, unwanted and expired medications is critical. That is why the DEA sponsors twice yearly national drug take-back days at designated drop off locations to ensure that these unneeded medications are responsibly discarded. The next take back day is October 22, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The DEA in 2014 also introduced several new ways to dispose of old or unused prescription drugs, including pre-paid return-mail packages and many more authorized drop-off sites, such as police stations, certain hospitals and pharmacies.

Opioid abuse often begins with an assumption that because the painkillers are prescribed by a physician, they are safe. That is why education is an important part of the solution. The FBI and DEA together developed a 45-minute film, "Chasing the Dragon," that details the lives of opioid and heroin addicts and is designed for late high school and college audiences – those who are most susceptible. Early in this school year, it is critical for students, teachers, parents and administrators to be keenly aware of the dangers posed by prescription drugs and heroin. Lives depend on it. Chasing the Dragon is available on the DEA website and on YouTube. The DEA website also includes a discussion guide for group viewing of the film. I encourage education leaders in Idaho, parent teacher organizations and associations, coaches and athletic departments to show the film at meetings and assemblies. Personnel from the U.S. Attorney's Office and the DEA are available to speak at these meetings and assemblies. In fact, we have arranged showings of the film as part of National Heroin and Opioid Awareness Week. Just contact us.

Health care providers, particularly prescribers, also are part of the solution. Last year, my office partnered with the Idaho State Boards of Medicine, Nursing, and Pharmacy, the Idaho Bureau of Occupational Licenses, the Idaho Office of Drug Policy, the Idaho Medical Association, Boise State University, Idaho State University, DEA, C.N.A. Professional Insurance, West Valley Medical Center, St. Luke's Health Systems, Independent Doctors of Idaho, the Boise City Police Department, St. Alphonsus Hospital, Garrett Richardson, PLLC, and Quane Jones McColl, PLLC, to host a Drug Diversion Summit designed to educate health care providers about the dangers of prescription drug diversion, and the possible law enforcement consequences. Simply put, health care providers must receive more education about prescribing pain medications throughout their medical school and practitioner careers. This cooperative venture by health care professionals, health care insurers, regulatory boards, health care law firms and law enforcement is the holistic approach the opioid and heroin crisis demands.

Prevention through Idaho's prescription drug monitoring program (PMP) is part of the solution. Through the PMP, pharmacists are required to input data on controlled substances at least weekly. Through the PMP then, pharmacists can identify and prevent persons from filling multiple prescriptions in a short period of time. Through the PMP, doctors can identify patients who may be seeking pills for their addiction, and not for their pain.

Yet another part of this public and community solution is expanded medical treatment for opioid use disorders and for incarcerated persons whose criminal conduct was fueled by addiction and substance abuse. The National Heroin Task Force, which issued its final report at the end of 2015, recommends, among other things, that persons be linked with services and treatments at the first sign of an opioid disorder, that effective treatment for opioid use disorder be made readily available and accessible, and that persons with substance abuse disorders have access to long-term treatment and recovery services.

Please join us this week in becoming aware of the dangers and devastation arising from heroin and opioid abuse. Please join us this week and be part of the solution.

#####