

Florida attorney general targets 'pill mills'

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Attorney General Pam Bondi shows several pages of advertisements in a tabloid newspaper for pain clinics and other businesses dispensing controlled drugs during a news conference Thursday, Feb. 3. Bondi said she has nothing against legitimate medical clinics but the state is starting a coordinated enforcement effort with local and federal authorities to crack down on "pill mills." / Bill Cotterell/news-press.com Capital Bureau



Karen Perry, cofounder of "NOPE" – Narcotics Overdose Prevention and Education – tells of her 21-year-old son's death during a news conference Thursday, Feb. 3, at the state Capitol with U.S. Attorney Pamela Marsh (c) and Statewide Prosecutor Nick Cox (R). / Bill Cotterell/news-press.com Capital Bureau

12:50 P.M. — TALLAHASSEE — Attorney General Pam Bondi announced plans for a major enforcement initiative against "pill mills" today, warning that Florida has become the nation's

leading source of pain-killing drugs that are resold illegally to drug addicts.

U.S. Attorney Pamela Marsh, statewide prosecutor Nick Cox and Dr. Fred Bearison of the state Board of Medicine joined Bondi and several police officials for a news conference at the state Capitol. They said they are not trying to punish legitimate doctors or stop people with severe pain from getting pills, but that a small number of physicians across Florida are deliberately over-prescribing pain pills to people who aren't sick but seek to resell them in other states.

Bondi said tell-tale signs distinguishing a pill mill from a legitimate pain clinic are include not accepting appointments or insurance and demanding cash. She said many have long lines out the doors of their offices, with armed guards on duty.

She outlined four key legislative proposals:

- Mandate a six-month license suspension and \$10,000 fine for doctors violating standards of care in prescribing pain killers.
- Impose felony penalties of one to five years in prison for fraud or misrepresentation in registering with the state as a pain clinic.
- Levy criminal penalties for doctors who don't perform physical examinations before dispensing more than three days' worth of controlled substances.
- Require doctors or druggists who have large supplies of controlled medicines to report any thefts within 48 hours of discovering such a loss.

The news conference also included Karen Perry, who helped found an advocacy group called NOPE — for Narcotics Overdose Prevention and Education — after her son died of a pill overdose while away at college. She said parents and school authorities don't know how widespread pill abuse is among young people, or how easy it is to get drugs without a prescription.

Last year, she said, Florida had about 5,000 deaths involving one or more prescription drugs.

Bondi said Gov. Rick Scott and key legislative leaders support her legislative plans for tougher enforcement against pill mills. State and federal prosecutors, as well as police agencies at all levels, are willing to coordinate the attack, she said.