

# Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi moves to crack down on pill mills

Tallahassee, Florida -- It's estimated seven Floridians die every day because of prescription drug abuse and police say Florida's so-called pill mills are feeding the problem.

Now Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi is launching an effort to crack down on the pill mills that have made Florida the epicenter of prescription drug abuse.

On Thursday, Bondi unveiled her proposals to eliminate the pill mills that dispense pain-killing drugs only for profit.

She says people are traveling to Florida from all over the country because they can get powerful prescription drugs such as oxycodone and then sell those pills on the street.

Det. Lorri Hall of the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office says drug dealers are making big profits on prescription drugs.

"They're coming from all over to the state of Florida to obtain these pills and to take them back up to be sold wherever they're from and these pills, the oxycodone 30 milligram pill, can be sold up in Kentucky for anywhere from \$25 to \$50 apiece. It's changed the drug wars actually in the state of Florida from a law enforcement perspective because they sell these pills on the street like they used to do with crack cocaine in the 80's. I mean, you can buy them anywhere."

Florida currently has 1,167 licensed pain clinics and most are legitimate. However, a small percentage of them are dispensing huge amounts of pain-killing drugs.

Bondi says it took her awhile to get her mind around one startling statistic from a grand jury report on pill mills.

"In a six-month time span in Palm Beach and Broward counties, doctors dispensed more than nine million oxycodone tablets. Six months in two counties."

Karen Perry's son Richie died of a prescription drug overdose in 2003. That prompted her to start a group called N.O.P.E, which stands for Narcotics Overdose Prevention and Education. It works to prevent prescription drug abuse through education and legislation.

"From the anguish of our family's loss we felt destined to create positive change so that no other parent or child would have to go through what our family had endured."

Perry says her son Richie was buying all kinds of prescription drugs from his college roommate, who was a healthy young man but was still able to get his hands on a wide variety of prescription drugs.

She clearly remembers the night in June, 2003 when she got a knock on the door at 2 a.m. to inform her that Richie had died.

Perry says too many people are dying and too many families are suffering as a result of pill mills.

She cites research that estimates six people are directly affected by every drug overdose death.

"Since Richie's death in 2003, there are 210,000 grief-stricken survivors still suffering like me."

U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Florida Pamela Marsh says the number of deaths from prescription drugs has surpassed the deaths from heroin and cocaine.

Marsh says she learned recently of a horrifying trend among young people. They throw "Skittles parties."

"Kids are literally raiding their parents' and their grandparents' medicine cabinets, getting together with their friends, dumping the bottles into one big bowl and popping pills. They don't even know what they're taking. They assume that these prescription drugs are safer than street drugs but they're not, especially in these lethal combinations."

The attorney general's Special Counsel on Pill Mills Dave Aronberg calls prescription drug abuse a more lethal problem in Florida than illegal drugs.

"This crisis demands a state response and the reason why we have this problem is because of the proliferation of these pill mills. These are not legitimate pain clinics. These are legal drug dealers. That's what they are. There are now more pill mills in Broward County than there are McDonalds in Broward County. There are more pill mills in Palm Beach County than there are McDonalds in Palm Beach County."

Some of the tell-tale signs of a pill mill include: making patients pay upfront in cash, only accepting walk-in patients, performing cursory or no medical exams and having an armed guard in the waiting area.

Bondi's legislative proposals include criminal penalties for doctors who prescribe more than three days worth of drugs without performing a medical exam and making physicians face prison time for violating standards of care when they prescribe pain killers.

She hopes state lawmakers act quickly on the proposals during the spring session starting next month.

Dave Aronberg