

Database proposed to stop Rx drug trafficking



Reported by: [Jesse Chavez](#)
 Email: jchavez@wptv.com
 Photographer: Dan Puentes
 Last Update: 8/14 8:30 pm



(MSNBC)

PALM SPRINGS, FL -- Seven of the suspects in a multi-million dollar prescription drug ring made their first court appearance this morning.

Police say the operation was based in Palm Beach Gardens.

In all, 12 people have been charged with trafficking Oxycontin and Zanax.

The suspects' M-O: getting a hold of phoney prescriptions, filling the scripts, then selling the pills.

The case has prompted renewed calls tonight, for a statewide drug registry.

Supporters say it's the only way to crack down on fraud.

Opponents say it's a matter of privacy.

Authorities say last month's arrest of Doctor Sergio Rodriguez is just one example of a potentially deadly problem.

He's accused of illegally prescribing drugs. Now the state wants to look at the records of all his patients.

Pharmacist Jay Etwaru, like many in the medical and law enforcement communities, says a prescription drug database would help provide a cure for the epidemic.

"We can look and make sure our patient actually needs a med," Said Etwaru. Instead of doing the wrong thing. It would make our jobs a lot easier."

Florida is now one of 15 states without a government-run registry that would close the communication gap among all physicians and pharmacies in the state.

"These drugs are extremely dangerous," said State Senator Dave Aronberg.

He says a registry proposal has passed twice in the Senate, but failed in the House.

"They are being abused just like cocaine or heroin," said Aronberg. "So it's incumbent upon the legislature to try to save lives and there's an easy to do it."

But, opponents of such a bill say prescriptions are part of a patients medical record, which should be kept private.

Former state Senator Joe Negron strongly opposed the bill two years ago.

"With all the accidental release of records that we've seen over the past couple of years, in addition to the problems with identity theft, I have serious reservations about whether the government should be running this system," said Negron.

Everyone agrees that something has to be done to keep drugs like Oxycodone and Zanax out of the wrong hands.

"On the legislative side," said Etwaru. "I just hope they can work on something that's going to help everyone."

In the meantime, Etwaru says he and his staff will remain extra cautious behind the counter.

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