



Senators Coleman and Feinstein to Continue Effort to
Make Using Internet Pharmacies Safer
February 16, 2005

Washington, DC – U.S. Senators Norm Coleman (R-MN) and Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) today introduced legislation to make the way Americans buy prescription drugs on the internet safer and to prevent individuals from obtaining prescription drugs without a prescription.

“Rogue internet pharmacies continue to pose a serious threat to the health and safety of Americans,” Senator Feinstein said. **“Simply put, a few unethical physicians and pharmacists have become drug suppliers to a nation. They provide pharmaceuticals – including powerful narcotics and anti-depressants – to patients without an in-person examination, based solely on an online questionnaire. The longer we wait to take action, the more people will be killed or seriously injured as a result of this unethical behavior.”**

“The way to stop these physicians and pharmacists is to make them accountable for their actions – by requiring basic disclosure information, prohibiting virtual examinations, and making it easier to shut down rogue Internet pharmacies,” **Senator Feinstein said.** “If we fail to take these modest, but important steps, there will be hundreds more families who suffer the unbearable loss of a loved one as a result of drugs obtained from rogue Internet pharmacies.”

“This legislation provides a new measure of safety currently missing when consumers try to buy medications on-line through Internet pharmacies,” Coleman said. **“This bill will make on-line drug purchasing safer from legitimate domestic Internet sites, and gets us closer to making the reimportation of drugs safe and secure for American consumers. This is a common sense approach to a very serious problem. We need to get this legislation enacted into law as soon as possible.”**

This legislation, called “The Ryan Haight Act”, is named for an 18-year-old honor student from La Mesa, California, who died after overdosing on painkillers he bought on the internet with a debit card his parents gave him to buy baseball cards.

Specifically, the legislation will:

- Require internet pharmacies to identify their business, pharmacist and physician for consumers;
- Prohibit internet pharmacies from distributing drugs to consumers with a prescription based solely on an online questionnaire; and
- Give state Attorneys General the ability to shut down rogue websites nationwide, rather than just in their individual jurisdictions.

Since the legislation was introduced, additional cases have come to light, which demonstrate the need for increased regulation of internet pharmacies.

- On Jan. 31, 2004, Leisa Kelly and her 17-year-old son Ryan were discovered in their San Andreas, Calif. apartment by Calaveras County sheriff's deputies. The two died from an overdose of the powerful anti-depressant amitriptyline, also known as Elavil. Leisa's mother, Candy, discovered that the drug had been purchased by her grandson through an internet prescription service operated out of North Carolina. The website merely requires the consumer to answer a questionnaire before prescription drugs are shipped. No proof from a physician as to the patient's condition or medical needs is required prior to purchasing the drugs.
- Nancy Shapiro of Nashville, TN, lost her 33-year old son, Scott, three days after Christmas 2003. Scott had been ordering hydrocodon, also known as oxycontin, from an internet site without a legitimate prescription. Scott's tragic death came at the hands of this highly addictive drug, which he obtained without a visit to a doctor or a valid prescription.

The National Association of Boards of Pharmacy estimates that there are thousands of internet pharmacies today. Just four years ago, there were less than 200.

The legislation is supported by the Federation of State Medical Boards, the National Community Pharmacists Association, the CA Medical Association, and the American Pharmacists Association.

Senators Coleman and Feinstein introduced this legislation in the 108th Congress.

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