

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE



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57 Arrests On Prescription Drug Charges in Upper Peninsula Menominee Doctor among Those Indicted by U.S. Government

July 30, 2008 -- (Marquette, MI) Charles R. Gross, United States Attorney for the Western District of Michigan, and Robert L. Corso, Special Agent in Charge of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Detroit Field Division, addressed an on-going cooperative effort to combat the illegal diversion of prescription drugs in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. The cooperative effort has included multiple investigations over a two-year period conducted by the DEA, Michigan State Police (MSP) and law enforcement agencies stretching across the Upper Peninsula. As a result, 57 defendants have been arrested on a number of state and federal drug distribution charges since the start of the cooperative effort. This is believed to be the largest coordinated clean-up of prescription drug violations in Michigan history.

Among those who have been arrested is Dr. Louis Cannella, a Menominee, Michigan, based physician. Dr. Cannella was indicted on July 29, 2008, for multiple violations of the federal Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act. The indictment alleges that, during an 11 month period from January to November 2006, Dr. Cannella prescribed in an unauthorized manner Oxycodone, Methadone, Morphine Sulfate, and hydrocodone (Vicodin, Lortab). In November 2006, Dr. Cannella surrendered his DEA Registration, thereby surrendering his privilege to prescribe controlled substance medications.

Investigations, such as the one of Dr. Cannella, and widespread complaints regarding the illegal diversion of prescription medications led the DEA to conduct an assessment of illegal prescription drug trafficking in the Upper Peninsula. Special Agent in Charge Corso said the following regarding this cooperative effort: “Beginning in February of 2007, the DEA conducted a threat assessment into the drug trafficking and drug abuse problems in the Upper Peninsula. The overwhelming consensus among the law enforcement, drug prevention, and medical communities was that the abuse of prescription medications was far and away the largest drug abuse problem among all segments of the population. With this information in hand, we set out with our law enforcement partners and devised a strategy to target those people responsible for illegally diverting pharmaceuticals in this region. The arrests we are announcing today demonstrate our commitment to weeding out those people who are responsible for wreaking havoc in our communities. The indictment and arrest of Dr. Cannella should serve as a warning to those medical professionals who might divert medications in an unauthorized manner. Those who misuse their position of trust for personal gain face federal prosecution and possible prison time, as a result of our work with the U.S. Attorney’s Office and our law enforcement partners to protect the health and safety of our communities.”

U.S. Attorney Gross stated, “Today’s announcement reflects our ongoing commitment to vigorously enforce federal laws against the distribution of both illegal drugs and prescription drugs diverted from their legitimate purposes. Citizens of the Upper Peninsula deserve our best efforts to eliminate, or at least minimize, the destructive social and economic consequences of drug abuse in their communities. We intend to keep working hard until that goal is achieved across the UP.”

The coordinated effort includes the participation of the United States Attorney’s Office for the Western District of Michigan, DEA, MSP Upper Peninsula Enforcement Team (UPSET), MSP Straits Area Narcotics Enforcement (SANE), MSP Forensic Laboratory, Delta County Prosecutor’s Office, Chippewa County Prosecutor’s Office, Chippewa County Sheriff’s Department, Mackinac County Prosecutor’s Office, Mackinac County Sheriff’s Department, Menominee County Prosecutor’s Office, Menominee County Sheriff’s Department, Menominee Police Department, Marinette County Prosecutor’s Office, Marinette County Sheriff’s Department, Marinette Police Department, and Cheboygan County Prosecutor’s Office

The charges in an Indictment against any person, including Dr. Cannella, are merely accusations; such a charged person is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law. Dr. Cannella is being prosecuted on behalf of the United States by Assistant U.S. Attorney Maarten Vermaat.

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