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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**LOCAL PHARMACIST EMMANUEL THAD EREME SENTENCED
TO 12 YEARS IN NARCOTICS CONSPIRACY**

GREENBELT, Maryland - Allen F. Loucks, United States Attorney for the District of Maryland, announced today that Emmanuel Thad Ereme, age 45, of Bowie, Maryland was sentenced yesterday by U.S. District Court Judge Peter J. Messitte to 12 years in prison for his convictions for drug distribution stemming from his practices as the owner and pharmacist at Hremt Pharmacy, located at 5644 Silver Hill Road, District Heights, Maryland.

After a seven week trial, a federal jury convicted Ereme in September 2004 of all counts of the indictment to include one narcotics conspiracy count and six counts of distributing illegal narcotics. The evidence at trial showed that beginning at least in 1999 and continuing through April 2002, Ereme, a licensed pharmacist, filled thousands of false and fraudulent prescriptions for Oxycodone, Dilaudid and Methadone. Ereme dispensed or caused others to dispense controlled substances pursuant to prescriptions that he knew were not authorized by a medical practitioner, prescriptions that were stolen from medical practitioners or otherwise fraudulent, and prescriptions that were not written by a medical practitioner for a legitimate medical purpose. For example, between May, 1997 and December 31, 2001 one individual presented forged prescriptions in his and

his common law wife's names. Most of the prescriptions included the forged signature of a practicing doctor who had never authorized these prescriptions. 151 forged prescriptions were presented for Dilaudid (Hydromorphone) and 26,400 pills were distributed, having a street value of \$528,000. During the same time period, 159 forged prescriptions for Methadone(Dolophine) were presented and 32,850 pills, having a street value of \$32,850.

The evidence at trial further showed that Ereme conspired with Beverly Wheatley, a Maryland dentist who provided unlawful prescriptions to Ereme and other employees of the Hremt Pharmacy in order to unlawfully obtain Oxycodone and other controlled substances for herself and others. Dr. Wheatley wrote prescriptions for herself in her name and the names of her family members and friends. Wheatley also sold prescriptions to patients who were abusing drugs. She referred the patients to HREMT pharmacy. During the conspiracy, employees observed the frequency of Dr. Wheatley and her patients prescriptions for controlled medications. At one point during the conspiracy, Ereme told Dr. Wheatley she needed to stop writing prescriptions in her daughter's name as that would be noticed by the insurance companies. Dr. Wheatley also discussed the addiction of some of her patients with Ereme. Dr. Wheatley was also instructed to rotate the type of drug prescribed so that the insurance company would continue to pay for the prescriptions and to avoid the attention of the insurance companies. Dr. Wheatley also charged her patients for prescriptions not related to treatment. Dr. Wheatley's prescriptions were filled through April of 2002. Dr. Wheatley, age 53, pled guilty before trial to conspiracy and health care fraud charges and was sentenced earlier this week by Judge Messitte to 42 months imprisonment.

At the sentencing, Judge Messitte said that the lengthy prison sentence he believed he was imposing in this case was meant to send an important message to pharmacists. He specifically noted the jury's verdict as confirming the breadth and scope of Ereme's illegal conduct borne out by the

vast amount of illegal drugs that were distributed through the course of Ereme's conspiracy and the enormous street value of those drugs. Judge Messitte admonished Ereme about the addictions he likely perpetuated by his conduct.

Allen Loucks, the U.S. Attorney for the District of Maryland, said of the convictions in this case: "This was an important case for the community. Pharmacists are the gatekeepers in a system that requires certain addictive and mind altering narcotics only be dispensed under the care and direction of a physician. Though medical practitioners are responsible for properly prescribing controlled substances, it is the neighborhood pharmacist who fills the prescription and who bears a corresponding responsibility to properly dispense controlled substances. Unfortunately, Oxycodone has become the new heroin of choice for many addicts. Since pharmacists are permitted by law to dispense Oxycodone by prescription, they have become breeding grounds for illegality. This successful prosecution sends a powerful message of accountability to pharmacies who would be led astray by addicts and drug dealers seeking an easy source for their pills."

In addition to Ereme and Wheatley, Dorothy Jackson, age 46 of Prince George's County, Maryland, was also convicted in June 2004 of forging prescriptions for Oxycodone and having them filled at Hremt Pharmacy. She was sentenced to 188 months by Judge Messitte last summer and is currently serving her sentence.

Ereme faces further federal charges for medicare fraud based on a durable medical equipment business he ran out of Hremt Pharmacy. The charges allege that Ereme submitted numerous false and fraudulent Medicare reimbursement claims for durable medical equipment such as "test strips", "lancets" and "catheters" that were provided to Medicare recipients when in truth no such equipment was provided.

The criminal charges in this indictment are the result of a joint investigation by the Drug

Enforcement Administration, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Prince George's County Police Department, and the United States Attorney's Office.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Sandra Wilkinson, Deborah Johnston and Bryan Foreman.