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# DEA Investigates Internet Pharmacies

By Amy Katz

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*The U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency -- or DEA -- conducted a yearlong investigation into Internet pharmacies -- in cooperation with five other U.S. federal agencies. The result of what is being called "Operation Cyber Chase" -- 20 arrests in eight American cities and four other countries.*

In 48 hours, 20 people were arrested, effectively shutting down an online pharmacy ring that was delivering 2.5 million pills a month, to just about anyone who placed an order. The DEA, which released pictures of some of the arrests, announced Wednesday that this group of Internet traffickers was using more than 200 websites to illicitly distribute pharmaceutical controlled substances.

"The Internet has become an open medicine cabinet, a 'help yourself' pill bazaar, to what makes you feel good," Karen Tandy, the administrator of the DEA explains.

A father and son team ran the drug trafficking organization from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and India. They were sending people narcotics and steroids. The buyers did not need prescriptions for the drugs, nor were they examined by doctors.

ABC News, an American television network, was in New York City when DEA agents arrested David and Elizabeth Armstrong. They were charged with shipping drugs through a website called international-pharmacy.COM. Authorities warn that such sites target young people and addicts -- and they have no medical legitimacy.

"On these illegal websites, there are no doctor visits, there are no exams, there are no x-rays, there are no tests," says Ms. Tandy.

The DEA says this operation was just the tip of the iceberg; there are tens of thousands more websites selling drugs illicitly. The agency says there are only slightly more than a dozen legitimate online pharmacies, which require prescriptions.



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