

7 Doctors, 2 Druggists Indicted

Accused in Sales of Prescription Drugs on Streets of L.A.

By MICHAEL SEILER,
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A federal grand jury has indicted seven doctors, two pharmacists and eight other people on charges of illegally prescribing and dispensing millions of dollars worth of codeine and other narcotics for sale on the streets of Los Angeles, officials said Thursday.

At the same time, state authorities filed civil actions against 31 defendants—13 of whom were included in the federal criminal actions—for what were termed “gross violations” of laws governing prescription drugs.

The indictment and civil complaints were announced at a Los Angeles press conference by U.S. Atty. Robert C. Bonner and state Atty. Gen. John K. Van de Kamp.

‘Operation Rx’

Bonner said the doctors, pharmacists, medical clinic and pharmacy operators and their assistants in the alleged street-drug dealing rings were caught up by a joint federal-state task force investigation dubbed “Operation Rx.”

The investigation netted “the largest number of doctors and pharmacy owners simultaneously indicted for illegal drug diversion in the history of drug enforcement,” Bonner said.

Authorities said the defendants in both the civil and criminal actions did not operate as one large drug ring, although there were connections. For instance, one drugstore, the Slauson Avenue Pharmacy, is alleged to have provided narcotics to a dozen clinics in Los Angeles and nearby communities. Bonner said the investigation is not finished.

“In the next nine months you are going to see other doctors and other pharmacists . . . brought before the grand jury,” he said.

Two-Year Probe

The federal indictments, unsealed Thursday, resulted from a two-year investigation in Los Angeles County, “which seems to have attained the entirely dubious distinction of being the state—and quite possibly the national—capital for prescription-drug abuse,” Van de Kamp said.

He said those indicted are believed to have prescribed or dispensed as much as \$35 million a year worth of codeine and other drugs, such as Preludin, Quaalude, Dilaudid, Ritalin and Talwin.

The narcotics, either alone or in combinations, are popular among street-drug users and resulted in at least 40 deaths in Los Angeles County in 1983, Van de Kamp said.

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He said those indicted and named as defendants in the civil actions “have committed terrible violations of their oaths as practitioners of health and healing. They are drug dealers in perhaps the worst sense of the term, because they occupy positions of great trust in our society.”

The federal indictments charge that the doctors operated out of about 50 clinics in the Los Angeles area, creating fictitious medical problems for patients, Assistant U.S. Atty. Joyce Karlin said.

Runners—people paid to make the transactions—took the prescriptions from the clinics to the drugstores, had them filled and then sold the drugs to street dealers, Karlin said.

Sometimes, according to Karlin and Van de Kamp, the doctors and pharmacists would not bother with runners but would simply “sell the drugs out the back

door” to street dealers or users.

Under federal law, those indicted face maximum penalties of 3 to 15 years in prison and fines of \$10,000 to \$125,000 for each count of unlawfully dispensing drugs or aiding and abetting the unlawful distribution of controlled substances.

The state’s civil action could result in the loss of medical and pharmacy licenses, as well as penalties ranging from \$5,000 to \$1 million, Van de Kamp said. He said his attorneys will be in Los Angeles Superior Court on Monday seeking temporary restraining orders to prevent defendants from prescribing or dispensing drugs until the cases are resolved.

Named in the federal indictment were Los Angeles physicians William Dupuis, 34; David N. Michelson, 38; Arthur Wesley Rachels, 46; John Berrel Barnes Jr., 31; Thomas C. Cloud, 43; Harry Leon Krohn, 47, and Beverly Hill physician Alvin Smolin, 60.

Doctors named in the state civil actions were Smolin, Dupuis, Michelson, Barnes and Cloud, as well as Mesfin Seyoum, 35, and Stanley Douglas Turner, 37, both of Inglewood; William Ballard, 66, of Boron; Joseph McMahan, 49, of Carson City, Nev., and Henry Rosendo, 30, and Sam Rosenfeld, 69, both of Los Angeles.

Pharmacies and medical clinics named in the state suits were identified by officials as Slauson Avenue Pharmacy, 2412 W. Slauson Ave.; Fashion Plaza Pharmacy, 1226 S. Main St.; Ampa Pharmacy, 2414 W. Slauson Ave.; Mar-Vel Clinic, 2516 Martin Luther King Blvd.; Clinica Central, 2024 W. 6th St.; Wiley’s Clinic, 4070 Buckingham Road; Westside Medical Clinic, 5011 San Vicente Blvd.; Dupuis Weight and Medical Clinic, 3850 Martin Luther King Blvd., Leimert, 4350 West 11th St., and Webster Medical Clinic, 2414 W. Slauson Ave., all in Los Angeles. Also named were Van Ness Medical Clinic, 14111 S. Van Ness Ave., Gardena, and Broderick Medical Clinic, 115 N. Wilmington Ave., Compton.