

Pew Internet and American Life Project

The Pew Internet and American Life Project produces reports that explore the impact of the Internet on families, communities, work and home, daily life, education, health care, and civic and political life. The Project aims to be an authoritative source on the evolution of the Internet through collection of data and analysis of real-world developments as they affect the virtual world.

A section of the Project focuses on health, specifically examining the impact the Internet has had on providing access to health information online as well as access to prescription drugs online. The project's website, www.pewinternet.org, includes links to past reports as well as additional information regarding the project's goals and mission.

The latest health report, *Online Health Search 2006*, by Susannah Fox, was released Oct. 29, 2006, and is available on their website for download at www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Online_Health_2006.pdf. The findings indicate that eight in 10 American Internet users have searched online for health information about specific topics, and that 10 million users search for health information on a typical day. Three-quarters of health information seekers do not consistently check the source and date of the health information they find online. The report goes into more detail on these topics and others.

News of Interest

- Christopher W. Smith was convicted on nine charges of conspiracy, illegal distribution of drugs and money laundering in the U.S. District

Court in Minneapolis Nov. 22, 2006, according to a press release issued by the Office of the U.S. Attorney for the District of Minnesota. Mr. Smith operated Xpress Pharmacy Direct until it was shut down in May 2005. Upon sentencing, he faces 20 years to life in prison, and he faces additional charges for conspiring to kill a witness in this case and for attempting to obstruct justice.

- Agents with the U.S. Customs and Border Protection agency confirmed that starting in early October 2006, the federal government will no longer seize prescription drug medication mailed from Canada to people in the United States, even though the practice is still against state and federal law. The agency will continue to examine packages for counterfeit medications. (Source: *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, Oct. 5, 2006).
- Federal agents seized a truckload of controlled pharmaceuticals from an online drug company based in Tampa, Fla., in November. The *St. Petersburg Times* reported Nov. 17, 2006, that Medipharma Rx Inc.'s license to sell or purchase controlled substances was suspended on the grounds the company may be posing an "immediate danger to public health," Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) spokeswoman Jeannette Moran said. The DEA worked with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement on the case. The business owners are entitled to an administrative hearing within 60 days, after which DEA Deputy Administrator Michele Leonhart will determine whether the business should have its certificates to deal in controlled substances permanently revoked.
- Federal agents shut down Baltimore's Newcare pharmacy in October, charging that it sold more

than \$20 million worth of hydrocodone to Internet customers without legitimate prescriptions. The *Baltimore Sun* story dated Oct. 11, 2006, also stated that more than 308,000 hydrocodone tablets with an estimated street value of \$1.5 million were confiscated from the pharmacy in the raid.

- A pharmacy in River Ridge, Louisiana, was shut down in October and charged with filling prescriptions obtained via the Internet for patients. The Louisiana Board of Pharmacy created a regulation in 2004 declaring invalid any prescriptions resulting from electronic questionnaires without physical examinations by doctors. (Source: The Times-Picayune Publishing Company, Oct. 16, 2006).
- An Oct. 26, 2006 DEA press release announced the arrest of five defendants in two separate criminal cases from Operation Cyber-Roid, involving illegal distribution of prescription drugs and anabolic steroids over the Internet. Six defendants were charged in a criminal complaint with conspiracy to distribute controlled substances, including anabolic steroids, through the website Pmeds.com. If convicted, the counts of conspiracy to distribute anabolic steroids or other Schedule III controlled substances carry a maximum penalty of five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.
- The Arizona Medical Board adopted substantive policy statement #12 regarding Internet prescribing in December 2006. This statement is meant to provide guidance and education to physicians on the law regarding the use of the Internet in the physician-patient relationship. The law, enacted in 2000, requires a physician to perform a physical evaluation of a patient or have a previously established relationship with a patient prior to issuing a prescription.

Disciplinary Actions

The following is a list of recent disciplinary actions taken against physicians who prescribed medicine via the Internet.

- Hawaii Board of Medical Examiners—Dianne H. Nguyen, M.D., license revoked on Aug. 11, 2006.

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