Maryland Attorney General Issues Recommendations for Combating and Preventing Prescription Drug Abuse and Diversion

Prescription drug abuse is a growing problem in Maryland, according to a recently released report from the State of Maryland Office of the Attorney General. The number of adult and juvenile admissions for treatment of prescription drugs has increased in recent years, as has the number of emergency department episodes. In addition, 86% of Maryland state and local law enforcement reported that OxyContin® was being diverted and abused in their jurisdiction in 2004, up from 75% in 2003. Below are the Attorney General’s seven recommendations for combating and preventing prescription drug abuse and diversion in Maryland, as described in the report.

• Design and implement an electronic prescription monitoring program that reduces the abuse and diversion of prescription drugs and facilitates the identification and treatment of individuals addicted to prescription drugs, while also protecting legitimate prescribing and dispensing as well as assuring patient privacy.

• Strengthen laws against obtaining prescription drugs with intent to distribute them for non-medical purposes. Most of these laws currently treat these offenses as misdemeanors.

• Reduce the diversion of prescription drug retail inventory by enacting legislation to regulate unlicensed pharmacy personnel, who often may carry out the entire dispensing process within a pharmacy.

• Develop information and training for pharmacists and physicians regarding how to detect and prevent doctor shopping and the use of fraudulent prescriptions.

• Launch a public outreach and education campaign to make people more aware of the dangers and signs of prescription drug abuse, the growing risk of the internet as a pipeline for pharmaceuticals, and the steps they should take to protect themselves and their children.

• Work closely with the DEA to increase coordination among federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies to combat drug diversion.

• Encourage federal efforts to regulate the online pharmaceutical industry and take all measures possible to educate people about the dangers of the current unfettered access to controlled dangerous substances and other prescription drugs via the internet.