

Pharmacists' Responsibility in Dispensing Controlled Substance Prescriptions by W. Benjamin Fry, R.Ph.

The following excerpt was taken from the Texas State Board of Pharmacy. This portion of the story highlights two ways of obtaining prescription painkillers.

Hopefully, this article will give pharmacists some tools they may use to help them determine which prescriptions are legitimate. Following are the most recent 'schemes' the Board is seeing.

Internet/Mail Order – The first 'scheme' involves the use of the Internet. A "facilitator" sets up a website that allows patients to choose the controlled substance they want to receive and the amount of drug they want to receive. The patient completes a short questionnaire with information about his or her personal health. The facilitator then recruits physicians from all over the US to "review" the patient medical history and prescribe the requested controlled substance. The facilitator recruits pharmacies from all over the US to dispense these prescriptions. The facilitator uses very sophisti-

cated recruitment and marketing procedures, including face-to-face marketing efforts. The recruiters market the service the pharmacy will be providing as provision of prescription drugs through the use of mail. Pharmacists are told that the facilitator has "checked-out" the physicians and are assured that the prescriptions are for legitimate prescriptions written by legitimate physicians. These recruiters offer the pharmacy a "dispensing fee" for each prescription and many times guarantee the pharmacy a minimum number of prescriptions per day. In addition, they will provide the pharmacy with all mailing materials and in some cases computer equipment and access to the Internet so the pharmacy can download the prescriptions from the website.

"Pill Mills" or "Pain Clinics" – The second type of 'scheme' to obtain controlled substances from pharmacies involves so-called "pill mills" or "pain clinics." Generally, these "pain clinics"

are manned by nurses or physician assistants and supervised by a physician who may be located in another state. Generally, every person who comes to the clinic is prescribed the same three drugs: carisoprodol, alprazolam, and hydrocodone. The combination of these drugs is sometimes called the "pain cocktail," "Houston cocktail," or "triple." Initially, most of these "pill mills" were located in the Houston area and most of the prescriptions were taken to Houston, Beaumont, or Orange pharmacies. Recently, however, the prescriptions are being presented to pharmacies throughout the state including Austin, the Dallas/Fort Worth area, and East Texas.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration contends that the first step in keeping youth drug-free involves parents establishing communication with their children.

How well do you know your child?

- 1. What is your child's favorite color?**
- 2. Who is your child's best friend?**
- 3. What are the names of your child's teachers? Who is your child's favorite teacher? Do you know why?**
- 4. Who are some of your child's role models? What does he or she admire about those individuals?**
- 5. What would your child wish for if he or she saw a falling star?**
- 6. What is your child's favorite food?**
- 7. What is your child's favorite movie or TV show?**
- 8. What three words would your child use to describe himself? To describe you?**
- 9. What are your child's hobbies?**
- 10. What are your child's future goals?**

American Airlines fined \$7M for safety violations

Government regulators cite the airline for maintenance issues and problems with its drug- and alcohol-testing programs.

NEW YORK (CNN) – Federal regulators announced Thursday they will seek fines totaling \$7.1 million against American Airlines over maintenance issues and problems with its drug- and alcohol-testing programs.

"The FAA believes the large total amount of the fine for these violations is appropriate because American Airlines was aware that appropriate repairs were needed, and instead deferred maintenance," the Federal Aviation Administration said in a statement announcing the decision. "In intentionally continuing to fly the aircraft, the carrier did not follow important safety regulations intended to protect passengers and crew."

American can contest the pro-

posed fines, the FAA said. There was no immediate reaction from the Fort Worth, Texas-based carrier to Thursday's announcement.

Nearly \$4.5 million of the proposed fines stem from American's continued operation of two MD-83 jetliners in December 2007, after pilots reported problems with the autopilot systems, the FAA said. An additional \$2.6 million fine was assessed due to American Airlines' failure to comply with the FAA Drug and Alcohol Workplace program.

In both cases, mechanics correctly diagnosed the problems, only to have the airline use the wrong provisions of its minimum equipment list to have the planes returned to service.

Regulators also accuse American (AMR, Fortune 500) of operating planes without timely inspections of their emergency lighting systems and of unspecified "past deficiencies" regarding drug and alcohol testing.