

March 31, 2006

For More Information:

Bonnie Catone: (215) 399-0980

BCatone@tresearch.org

**Parents are the First and Best Defense Against
Prescription Drug Abuse by Adolescents**

*A. Thomas McLellan, Ph.D., Noted Substance Abuse Researcher, Warns of Increasing
Availability of Potent Prescription Drugs from Unregulated Internet Sites*

New York, March 2006: From the standpoint of teenage substance abuse, parents have more to fear from the Internet than they understand and there are no quick government fixes on the horizon, A. Thomas McLellan, Ph.D. said today in remarks delivered at a press conference sponsored by the Partnership for a Drug Free America.

“Parents must protect their children from drug-dispensing sites on the Internet because the government can’t right now,” McLellan said. “Eighty percent of these sites are based offshore and beyond the reach of law enforcement. And it does not matter that many of the drugs they offer have valid medical uses – these drugs are just as potent and lethal as heroin,” he said.

McLellan, a researcher and expert on substance abuse, is Executive Director of the Philadelphia-based Treatment Research Institute where he and colleagues have been evaluating the availability of abusable drugs from unregulated sites on the Internet. Their findings, first reported in 2004 in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, found an abundance of sites where even novice browsers – certainly teenagers – could locate and purchase drugs without a prescription. Most of the sites required only a shipping address and payment method to complete a drug sale. Complementary trial offers were featured and many sites boasted of secretive shipping practices to avoid confiscation by government officials.

“Teenage use of the Internet has grown since we published that study nearly two years ago,” McLellan said. “With the release of today’s findings from the Partnership, again showing the prevalence of prescription and over-the-counter drug abuse, this message bears repeating: kids are scavenging through parents’ medicine chests *and* they are surfing the web to get their hands on these drugs,” he emphasized.

He cited two medicines increasingly abused by teenagers and demonstrated how readily available they are from the Internet: OxyContin (active ingredient: Oxycodon) and Vicodin, both in the same family of drugs as heroin. “Unlike heroin, OxyContin and Vicodin are appropriate for pain

management when prescribed and taken under a physician's care. Taken over long periods of time they are highly addictive, and when snorted or injected, as some teenagers do, they carry the same risk of addiction and death due to overdose as heroin," McLellan said.

"Eight to twelve tablets of Vicodin, one-quarter to one-half tablet of Oxycontin are roughly as potent as one bag of heroin," he added.

McLellan noted that neither publicity nor interdiction appear to put a dent in the Internet traffic. In November 2004 the highly publicized entry of Rush Limbaugh into treatment for opioid dependence sparked a five-part series in the *Washington Post* on buying opioid medications on-line. Both events were followed by a dramatic increase in traffic to sites advertising no-prescription drug sales, according to Google tracking mechanisms. A similar steep increase occurred in the three months following the April 2004 DEA arrest of a large Internet drug dealer, one found to have issued 2.5 million dosage units of Schedule II-V controlled substances *per month*.

"The confounding jurisdictional and law enforcement issues presented by this international drug laboratory gives parents few choices other than exercising their considerable influence over their children – both by talking with them about the dangers of prescription drugs and monitoring their activity on the Internet," McLellan said.
