

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Pharmacist, patient groups call for inquest into B.C. counterfeit-pills death

OTTAWA, ON, March 22, 2007 - A coalition of Canadian pharmacists and patients today called on the Regional Coroner for Vancouver Island to hold an inquest into the death of a British Columbia woman who died apparently after taking counterfeit pills she ordered online from a purported Canadian internet pharmacy.

The Canadian Pharmacists Association (CPhA), Ontario Pharmacists' Association (OPA) and Best Medicines Coalition (BMC) made the request by letter to Rose Stanton, Regional Coroner for Vancouver Island.

Coroner Stanton reported Tuesday that poisoning appeared to be the cause of death of 57-year-old Marcia Bergeron, who died December 27th, 2006. The coroner has linked the death to pills Bergeron purchased from a purported Canadian Internet pharmacy about a month before she died. Toxicology tests revealed the counterfeit pills contained dangerously high levels of the heavy metals strontium, uranium and lead, the coroner said.

"The circumstances of Ms. Bergeron's death are disturbing to Canadian pharmacists and patients, and an inquest is necessary to make public all the facts in this case," said CPhA Executive Director Jeff Poston. "This case reinforces our message that Canadians should buy their drugs from their community pharmacist, not from unknown internet sites."

"Under B.C. law, the investigating coroner may hold an inquest as a formal court proceeding that allows for the public presentation of all evidence relating to a death. Inquests may be held to focus community attention on a death and/or to satisfy the community that the death of one of its members is not overlooked, concealed or ignored. This is precisely the type of case that demands an inquest be held."

"Every Canadian patient is entitled to learn what happened to Marcia Bergeron," said Louise Binder, chair of the Best Medicines Coalition. "If Internet pharmacies masquerading as Canadian are supplying fake drugs to Canadian patients, we need the facts fully exposed, and those responsible identified and held to account for their actions."

Said Marc Kealey, CEO of the Ontario Pharmacists' Association: "We have demanded that the federal government crack down on internet pharmacy and cross-border drug sales, and pointed out the serious health risks posed by the proliferation of bogus Canadian internet pharmacies selling counterfeit drugs. An inquest into Ms. Bergeron's death can alert Canadians to these dangers."

Coroner Stanton expressed concern that more deaths may occur among patrons of phony Canadian internet pharmacies. "We're often the tip of the iceberg," she said. "She's not the only one buying pills off the internet."

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Coroner Stanton said most purported Canadian internet pharmacies, marketed toward bargain-seeking U.S. patients, pretend to be Canadian when in fact they are located overseas. The sites also change web addresses frequently, making them difficult to trace, she said. "They all claim a Canadian legitimacy," she

said. "But if you start looking deeper, you find that neither the company names or affiliations they mention are actually legitimate."

"Medicines purchased over the Internet from sites that conceal their actual physical address are counterfeit or substandard in over 50% of cases," stated the World Health Organization's International Medical Products Anti-Counterfeiting Task Force in a November 15, 2006, report.

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