

CBC NEWS

CANADA

JULY 6, 2007

Coroner's inquest highlights dangers of medications ordered online

A B.C. woman's death last year from metal toxicity underlines the dangers of buying medications through the internet, says the regional coroner for Vancouver Island.

Marcia Bergeron, 57, of Quadra Island died last December from a heart attack brought on by toxic metals in her system. Toxicology tests found the concentration of aluminum in her liver to be 15 times the norm.

A coroner's inquiry found on Thursday the toxins came from counterfeit medicines Bergeron had ordered online.

Coroner Rose Stanton warns that the practice of buying cheap drugs online is increasing and that there are very few safeguards for consumers.

"It's certainly happening at a significant enough rate that it can keep these people in business who are selling the drugs.

"And people who are buying are people who for one reason or another can't get to a pharmacy ... or they don't want people to know the drug they are purchasing," Stanton told CBC News.

"It's no surprise that the leading drug purchased over the internet is Viagra."

Provincial Health Minister George Abbott echoed Stanton's warning, saying that although the federal government regulates internet trade, the sale of drugs online appears to be uncontrollable.

"There is no way for Health Canada or anyone else to ensure the safety of the product that is coming to the recipient when it's purchased over the internet," he told CBC News.

Evidence gleaned from Bergeron's computer suggests she had ordered sedative and anti-anxiety drugs over the internet. Unmarked packages were also found in her home.

The coroner's report noted that internet drug sites selling counterfeit medication are a complex and emerging health-care problem, but made no recommendation on how to put a stop to it.

Still, the case will help agencies such as Health Canada and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration fight counterfeit drug peddling on the internet, says Stanton.

With files from the Canadian Press

<http://www.cbc.ca/health/story/2007/07/06/internetdrugs.html>