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Drug Investigation Leads to 29 Arrests in Osceola

Law enforcement personnel focusing on prescription drug fraud arrested 29 suspects in Osceola County, according to reports from the authorities. The group of arrested individuals had a structured and well-planned system that enabled them to print fake prescriptions for a variety of drugs, including oxycodone, hydromorphone and alprazolam. These prescriptions were then given to the suspects who pretended to be patients. They would fill them and sell the drugs to interested buyers. In turn, they were paid with drugs for their participation in the scheme.

Several agencies, including the Osceola County Investigative Bureau, the Osceola County Sheriff's Office, the Kissimmee Police Department and the St. Cloud Police Department cooperated to implement the sting operation, which was called "Operation Rx Printshop." The sting took more than a year to investigate. Authorities related that the scheme took time to organize as members needed to work out details, such as printing methods for the prescriptions and faking the doctor's signatures.

The organization stole tracking information from unwitting physicians who are not thought to have known about the fraudulent prescriptions. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration supplies tracking numbers to doctors to use on prescriptions. The tracking numbers prove the doctor is authorized to provide prescriptions to patients. In turn, the state of Florida has a Prescription Drug Monitoring Program that collects data on dispensed substances. That data is reviewed by a group of individuals in order to cut down on fraudulent prescription activity.

Most of the individuals taken into custody will be charged with fraud and/or drug trafficking according to official reports. The Florida Attorney General's Office of Statewide Prosecution will review the cases for further prosecution. Three of the suspects are being held in custody on a bond of a minimum of \$500,000. Four people are still wanted by the authorities for their participation in the fraud. Law enforcement personnel have issued arrest warrants for them regarding felony charges.

The ramifications of the scheme are far-reaching, as the group allegedly trafficked more than 17,000 pills in a one-year time period. One woman, the girlfriend of one of the leaders, died from a drug overdose.

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