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KERRY STEIGERWALT ADDRESSES DRUG PANEL ON DANGERS OF OXYCONTIN

SAN DIEGO (DEC. 7, 2009) – Prominent local attorney Kerry Steigerwalt detailed the dangers of OxyContin abuse today at a meeting of health, law enforcement and treatment professionals addressing the rapidly increasing problem of illegal use of the highly addictive opiate.

The session was held at a La Jolla treatment facility of the Bay Recovery Center, one of the pioneers in treatment of chemical dependency, chronic pain and sleep disorders. Attending were members of a local law enforcement task force dealing with the problem at the street level, physicians, recovery specialists, former addicts and attorneys.

Steigerwalt, managing partner at Kerry Steigerwalt's Pacific Law Center, told the gathering that there has been a shocking increase in the number of cases of OxyContin abuse, mainly among teen-agers and young adults from well-to-do communities in San Diego County.

"In all of 2007 the District Attorney's Office filed 34 Oxy-related cases," Steigerwalt told the group. "Between November of 2008 and the end of last September there were 175 cases filed. Between 2008 and 2009 there were 53 Oxy-related deaths."

Steigerwalt said OxyContin abuse is incredibly dangerous because it is a very addictive drug that causes severe withdrawal problems and that abusers and addicts will do anything they can to avoid being jailed and deprived of the drug.

Steigerwalt said he has represented the whole spectrum of OxyContin abuse from doctors illegally dispensing the drug to high-achieving teens whose lives have been torn apart by addiction to the euphoric high the opiate provides.

“The judges here in San Diego are getting educated about this drug and its dangers and getting stricter and stricter in dealing out punishment,” said Steigerwalt. He said there is a far higher likelihood of an OxyContin abuser or dealer facing prison time than for similar crimes involving the more common illegal drugs marijuana and methamphetamine.

“That’s because this is an incredibly dangerous drug that frequently leads abusers into heroin,” he said.

Officials at the session said OxyContin is expensive but easy to obtain in upper-scale neighborhoods in the North County, Poway and La Jolla. It is smuggled across the border from Mexico, bought with illegal prescriptions here in San Diego and frequently stolen from unsuspecting parents who have valid prescriptions for the drug, which is commonly prescribed for pain.

Steigerwalt said he has been effective in immediately getting his clients into a treatment program and, in the common cases of teen-age abuse, bringing parents into the situation.

“These kids are scared to death about going to jail because of the withdrawal trauma and in many cases they have been hiding this from their parents,” he said.