

Testimony

of

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Special Narcotics Prosecutor

Before

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Committee on Public Safety

Fiscal Year 2013
Preliminary Budget Hearings

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250 Broadway
New York, NY

OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL NARCOTICS PROSECUTOR

FY2013

I would like to thank the City Council for its consistent support of the Office of Special Narcotics and all of the District Attorneys' Offices through the years. I appreciate the leadership and dedication of the Public Safety Committee and Chair Vallone in addressing the criminal justice issues that confront all of our offices. This year we are especially appreciative of new needs funding which we received through the Office of Management and Budget.

Prescription Drug Epidemic: Last year I spoke to you about a new threat – the exploding, illegal use of prescription opioid drugs in New York City. I am sorry to report that the problem has not only failed to level off – it has worsened significantly over the past year. We are now in the throes of a full-blown epidemic. Public health officials, the medical community and law enforcement throughout New York State and across the country recognize the seriousness of the problem and are scrambling to combat this crisis.

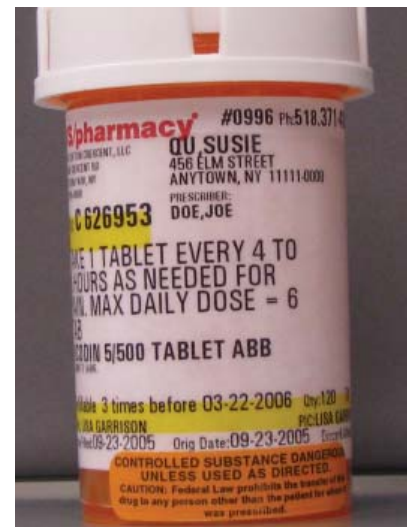
While my office has been focusing on the issue of prescription drug abuse and diversion for approximately two years, our efforts intensified this year. Over the summer, with support from the Mayor's Office, I reorganized my office to form a new Prescription Drug Investigation Unit with a Unit Chief and six attorneys, who spend the majority of their time on prescription drug cases. Because of the complexity of the cases, my Executive District Attorney in Charge of Investigations spends most of his time overseeing these prosecutions. Referrals from around the city are pouring in.

The Prescription Drug Investigation Unit announced its first indictment in November after a yearlong investigation. Dr. Stan Xuhui Li, a physician who operated a pain management clinic in Flushing, Queens, is charged with illegally selling prescriptions to someone who ultimately died from an overdose. An ongoing investigation is focused on the circumstances surrounding other deaths.

Thus far our investigations revealed that the clinic saw as many as 90 patients a day, and more than 16,000 prescriptions—65% of which were for oxycodone (generic for OxyContin) and other opiate drugs—were written over a two and a half year period. These practices resulted in black market pill sales, and we are investigating the connection to the overdose deaths of a number of individuals.

A case of this nature is extraordinarily difficult to put together, given patient confidentiality and other sensitive issues surrounding health care. Our drug laws were not designed to confront the problem of prescription drug diversion, which can be traced back to widespread overprescribing of highly addictive opioid painkillers.

Just to give you a sense of the severity of the prescription drug abuse problem in 2011, the U.S. Center for Disease Control announced that fatal overdoses from prescription painkillers have outstripped automobile accidents as the leading



Patients would line up outside Medical Pain Management in Flushing, Queens before office hours began.

cause of death nationwide. The problem is intensifying in New York City as well.

In order to track this epidemic, my office has once again performed a statistical analysis of prescriptions filled in New York City, using data obtained from the New York State Health Department through a Freedom of Information Law request. We are stunned by what we have learned.

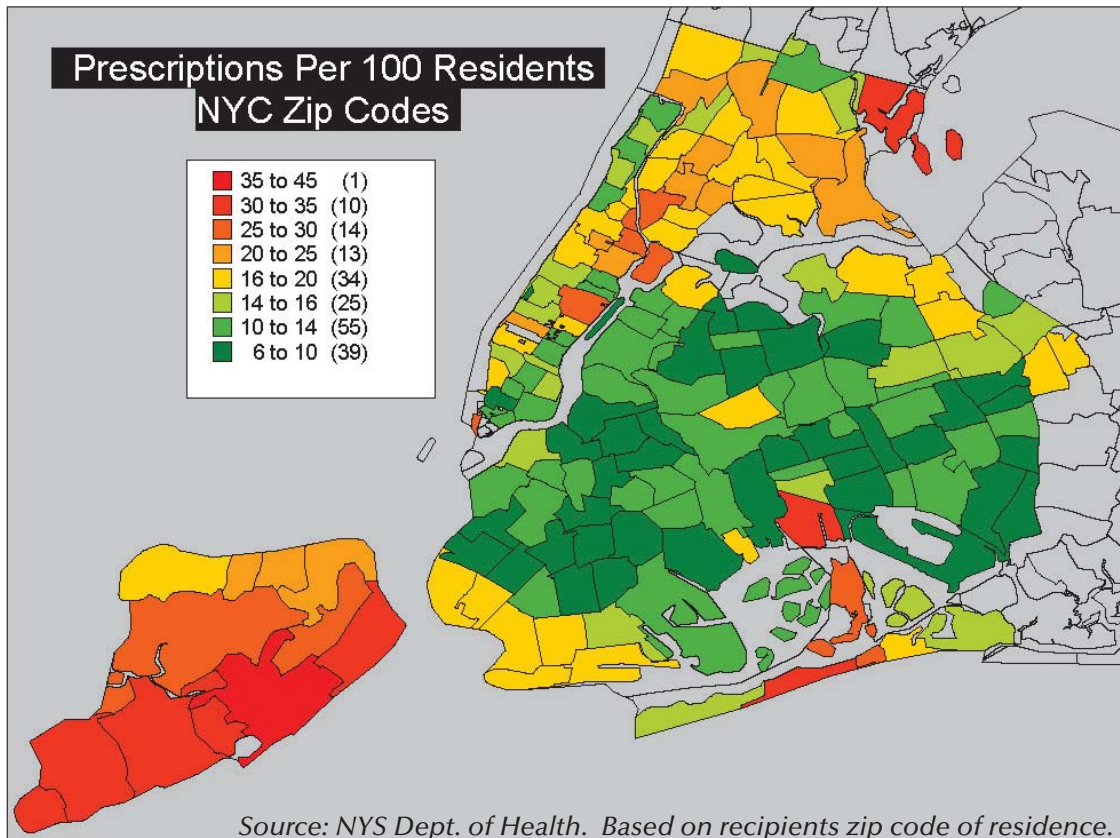
Nearly two million prescriptions were filled for oxycodone and hydrocodone (generic for Vicodin) in 2011. That is the equivalent of a prescription for nearly one for four New York City residents. This number does not include other potent opioids that are increasingly being abused as well, such as fentanyl and oxycodone.

Oxycodone Prescriptions 2010-2011				
County	2010	2011	Change	%
Bronx	230,735	259,715	28,980	13%
Kings	245,499	287,991	42,492	17%
Manhattan	218,843	248,249	29,406	13%
Queens	227,914	265,032	37,118	16%
Richmond	136,808	140,240	3,432	3%
	1,059,799	1,201,227	141,428	13%

Source: NYS Dept. of Health. Based on recipients county of residence.

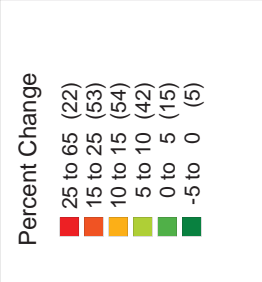
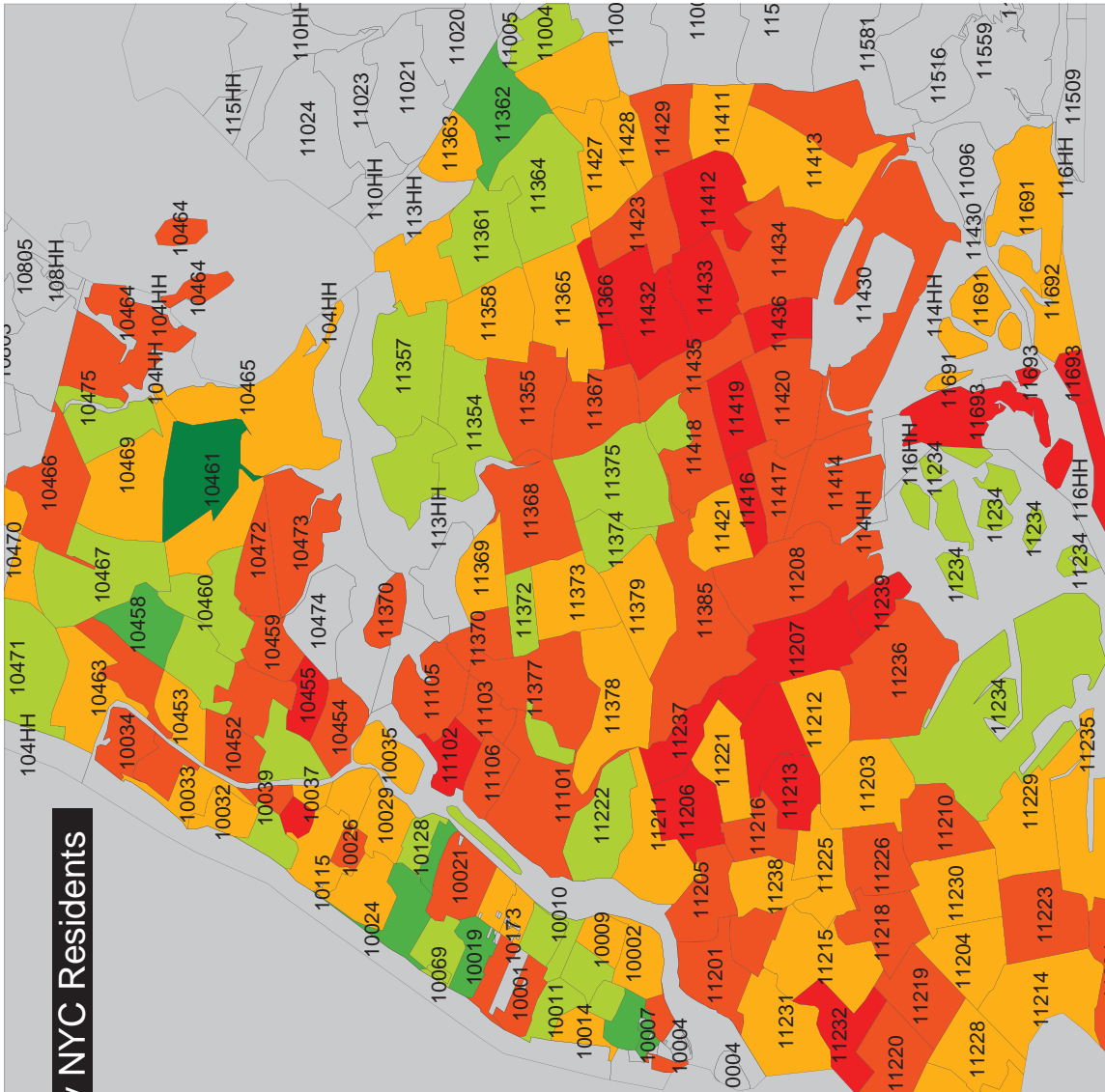
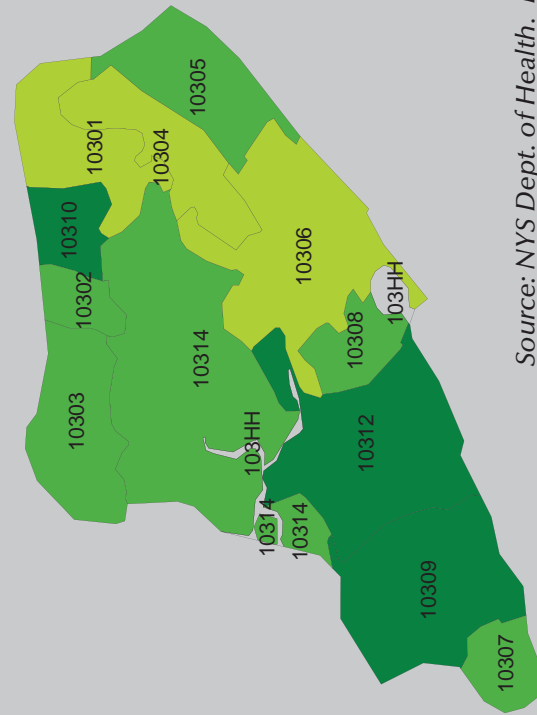
In 2011, there was a one year 13% increase in the number of oxycodone prescriptions filled for residents citywide – from just over 1 million in 2010 to 1.2 million. Staten Island remains the borough most affected by the opioid epidemic, with the highest rates of prescriptions filled per capita and, correspondingly, it has the highest overdose rates. In 2011, there were 140,240 oxycodone prescriptions filled in the borough – the equivalent of a prescription for 3 out of every 10 people.

The good news is that the prescription rate in Staten Island appears to have leveled off, with the number of oxycodone prescriptions in the borough growing by only 3% in 2011, as compared to a 21% increase in 2010. The borough with the greatest increase in oxycodone prescriptions in 2011 was Brooklyn at 17%, followed by 16% in Queens, and 13% for both Manhattan and the Bronx.



Change in Oxycodone Prescriptions Filled by NYC Residents

While the number of oxycodone prescriptions being filled by Staten Island residents appears to have leveled off, with a 3% increase in 2011 as compared to 2010, the problem continues to explode elsewhere in the city. In Brooklyn, there was a 17% jump in prescriptions filled by residents, followed by a 16% increase in Queens, and 13% in both Manhattan and the Bronx.



Source: NYS Dept. of Health. Based on recipients zip code of residence.

While the vast majority of doctors act in good faith, the unscrupulous few who sell prescriptions for profit jeopardize the health of their patients and the community at large. The first indictment handled by my office's new Prescription Drug Investigation Unit focused on physician conduct. Building this sort of criminal case against a doctor is no small undertaking. A team of prosecutors, investigators and analysts has devoted hundreds of hours to reviewing prescription records, interviewing witnesses and conducting surveillance of the clinic. My investigators visited each Medical Examiner in the region and compared the doctor's patient lists to their overdose records by hand.

With the continued support of the Mayor's Office and the City Council, we hope to further develop expertise in the area of prescription drugs and to serve as a resource for the city and other law enforcement agencies. In addition to the new unit, my office is also participating in several new task forces designed to address the problem of prescription drug abuse. We participate in the Mayor's Task Force on Prescription Painkiller Abuse, the New York State Interagency Workgroup on Preventing Prescription Drug Misuse, Diversion and Overdose, and more recently we were invited to join the federal Prescription Drug Initiative led by the Eastern District of New York.

Through our work, we have discovered that there is a significant need for new regulations and legislation to address the prescription drug epidemic. We have devoted considerable time and resources over the past year towards developing, drafting and proposing legislation that would enhance New York State's ability to identify, investigate and prosecute those who are fueling this deadly epidemic. Greater oversight of the prescribing and dispensing of opioid painkillers is needed and law enforcement must have additional tools, designed for this unique issue, if we hope to get control of this problem.

Fiscal 2012 Funding: As you may recall, my office was significantly disadvantaged by the FY2012 Budget adopted last June. We did not benefit from the funding increase given to some of the District Attorneys, nor did we receive any revenue funds other District Attorneys received through the new Revenue Plan. Instead, we started the year with a projected budget deficit of over \$800,000 for FY 2012 and over \$1.4 million for FY 2013 and the out years.

Since we were at the helm of the New York City battle against the prescription drug epidemic, we reorganized our office to address prescription drug cases, and we reached out to the Office of the Criminal Justice Coordinator and the Office of Management and Budget seeking their support and financial assistance.

Recognizing the seriousness of the prescription drug problem, the amount of resources needed to investigate and prosecute these cases, and the difficult financial situation we were left to face, OMB agreed to grant us our new needs request and funded our prescription drug unit. OMB also gave us funds for our Safe Neighborhood initiative. We are very grateful for their support.

Funding for Expanded Prescription Drug Unit: Unfortunately, as we continue working on these prescription drug cases, we realized that prescription drug abuse problem is still increasing at an alarming rate. This is due not only to the growing number of people who are abusing prescription drugs, but to the ever increasing referrals to the office triggered by public awareness. The inves-

tigation and prosecution of a prescription drug case is extremely complex and difficult, requiring an expertise in entirely new subject matters involving doctors, pharmacists and the pharmaceutical industry. We are working with a variety of experts to help us to understand and navigate this new territory.

We are also faced with inadequate laws and regulations governing the prescribing and dispensing of controlled substances. My senior staff and I have been at the forefront of policy development, legislative work, and coordinating with other city, state and federal agencies with jurisdiction over these issues. Because of these new challenges and issues, the cost of investigating and prosecuting prescription drug cases is much higher than we had anticipated over a year ago. In order to effectively combat this booming epidemic, we need an additional \$455,000 in fiscal 2013. This funding will provide us with the desperately needed resources to hire additional assistants, analysts, and investigators and to pay for our extensive policy work that is crucial if we are to meaningfully curb the scourge of prescription drug abuse.

Funding for Expanded Prescription Drug Unit	
	Amount
1/2 Executive Assistant	\$ 75,000
2 Assistant District Attorney	150,000
1 Senior Rackets Investigator	70,000
2 Investigative Analysts	100,000
General Administrative Support	60,000
Total Funding Needs	\$ 455,000

Drugs and Violence: Nothing could have prepared us for the horrors of the Father’s Day pharmacy massacre in Medford, Long Island, where four innocent people were murdered in cold blood – for pills. That shooting was a tragic reminder of the close connection between violence and drugs – even the legal kind. Fortunately, my office was able to provide some assistance and the Suffolk County District Attorney’s Office and the Suffolk County Police Department were able to quickly identify David Laffer as the shooter in that case and bring him to justice.

It is no longer unusual for my office to seize prescription drugs alongside loaded firearms and other narcotics, like heroin and cocaine. In March of 2011, we arrested a Staten Island drug trafficker whose home served as a heavily-fortified stash house. This drug trafficker was apprehended after federal agents with the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency in Newark observed him conduct a sale in New Jersey. Agents found a 40 caliber pistol in the white Lexus the defendant was driving. A subsequent search of his house on Staten Island yielded two additional guns – an AR-15 rifle and a 9 mm pistol – as well as body armor, ski masks and sophisticated surveillance equipment. Approximately 3,000 oxycodone pills, 30 grams of cocaine, and quantities of alprazolom (the generic name for Xanax) and anabolic steroids were also stashed around the home. Hanging prominently on the wall was a framed poster of Al Pacino’s “Scarface”.



“Scarface” poster hanging on wall in home where guns, Oxycodone and cocaine were recovered.

Meanwhile, our important work conducting traditional narcotics investigations continues. We handle a full load of cases involving violent drug crews trafficking in illegal drugs, like heroin and cocaine. This past year, a six-month wiretap investigation led to the arrest of a New York drug kingpin and the seizure of 22 kilos of heroin (48.4 lbs.) in New York City, and 32 kilos of cocaine (74.8 lbs.) and a large arsenal of weapons in Texas. Intercepted phone calls revealed that the drug kingpin travelled to Mexico to arrange for narcotics to be purchased and smuggled across the border to Texas. DEA agents seized a 32-kilo load of cocaine in Texas as it was being transported to New York.

Additional searches of the kingpin's home and stash houses in Yonkers and the Bronx yielded 22 kilos of heroin, two guns and \$100,000 cash, as well as expensive jewelry, a Bentley automobile and several other luxury vehicles. The kingpin's supplier was identified as a Gulf cartel associate operating out of Houston, Texas. Agents in Texas executed court authorized searches in one related residence and recovered an arsenal of 20 tactical military-grade guns, as well as thousands of rounds of ammunition and high-capacity magazines.

Community Engagement: We are grateful for city funding that allowed us to dismantle entrenched drug networks and open Police Athletic League (PAL) Play Streets and Teen Impact Centers. The Special Narcotics Prosecutor, the Bronx District Attorney and PAL announced the opening of a PAL Play Street and Teen Impact Center at I.S. 229, Roland Patterson School in July and December of 2011. The programs provide a safe haven for youth in Morris Heights to participate in fun recreational activities.

Over the past two years, both Special Narcotics and the Bronx DA's office dismantled violent drug gangs that were operating in the immediate vicinity of I.S. 229. With the coordination of PAL, the prosecutors' offices join in a cooperative effort to maintain the gains achieved when drug organizations are removed from a community, and to improve relationships between young people and law enforcement. The school was the second location where Special Narcotics helped to establish PAL programs. A PAL Teen Impact Center and Play Street opened at Brooklyn's Albany Houses, a New York City Housing Authority complex, in 2010 and 2011. With the generous support of the city, we will be able to continue these programs in the future.

In another community outreach program, the Special Narcotics Prosecutor collaborated with the Richmond County District Attorney to raise awareness about the dangers of prescription drug abuse at high schools on Staten Island. Former NBA star Chris Herren made special visits to Tottenville High School and Susan E. Wagner High School to share his harrowing, cautionary tale with students whose community is the epicenter of the prescription drug epidemic in New York City.

Mr. Herren described how he achieved his dream of playing for the Boston Celtics, only to descend into a severe oxycodone and heroin addiction that destroyed his professional basketball career. A series of near-fatal overdoses drove Mr. Herren, 36, into drug treatment and he now works with young people as part of his continuing recovery. Herren's story is also the subject of a popular ESPN documentary, "Unguarded". Herren shared his time with the Staten Island students because of the close working relationship between the Special Narcotics Prosecutor and Daytop Village, where Herren underwent drug treatment.



SNP, the Bronx District Attorney and the Police Athletic League announced the opening of a PAL Teen Impact Center at I.S. 229 Roland Patterson School.



*Former NBA star Chris Herren addresses students at Tottenville High School.
Staten Island Advance/ Anthony DePrimo*

Trends

A Growing Problem

Battling prescription drug abuse and diversion is a top priority of the Office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor for the City of New York in 2011. This deadly problem has reached epidemic proportions in New York City and nationwide. It poses unique problems for law enforcement because unlike the previous drug epidemics we have faced in New York City, prescription drugs originate from a legal source – the pharmaceutical industry and physicians' offices.

The amount of opioid painkillers in circulation is astounding. For the year 2011 for New York City residents, there was a combined total of nearly two million prescriptions filled for oxycodone (i.e. OxyContin) and hydrocodone (i.e. Vicodin) – two of the most highly abused prescription opioids. Although the number of hydrocodone prescriptions filled dropped 4% in 2011, it is still too high and could be explained by a shift to Oxycodone.

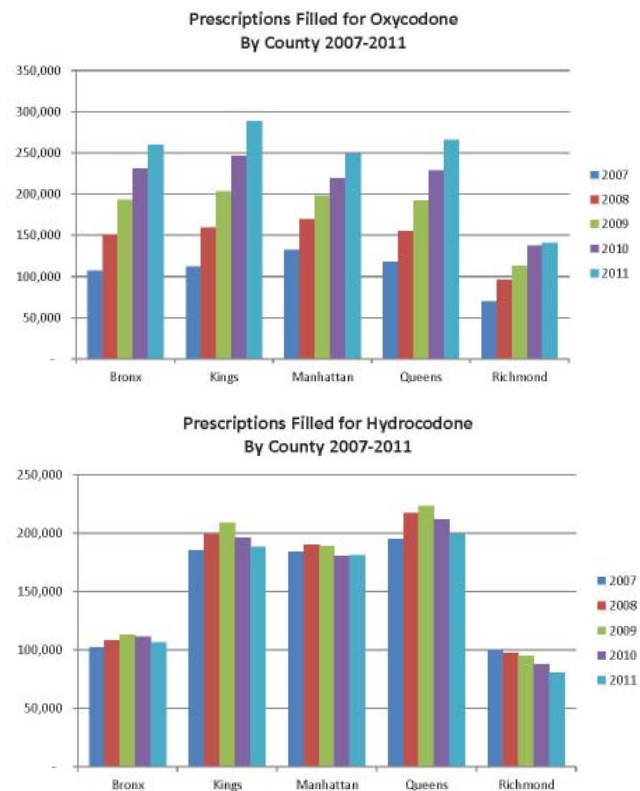
Alarming, the number of oxycodone prescriptions filled for New York City residents increased by 13% in 2011, with more than 1.2 million prescriptions filled. That number is the equivalent of 14% of the total city population. Oxycodone prescriptions across all five boroughs have increased by a stunning 124% average in the past four years. The largest four-year increases were seen in Brooklyn (158%) and the Bronx (142%), followed by Queens (126%), Staten Island (102%) and Manhattan (88%).

Staten Island continues to be the borough most inundated with oxycodone, despite the fact that it only had a 3% increase in oxycodone prescriptions filled in 2011. If calculated on a per-capita basis, 29% of Staten Island's population could have received an oxycodone prescription in 2011. This is unacceptably high.

Overdose Deaths

Overdose deaths from prescription drugs have also been skyrocketing. In 2009, prescription opioid painkillers caused one-quarter of all unintentional drug overdose deaths in New York City.¹ This represents a 20% increase from 2005. In contrast, the number of heroin overdose deaths in New York actually decreased by 24% over the same period.

The trend is equally astonishing on a national level. According to data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention, prescription



drug overdose deaths across the country have now surpassed automobile fatalities. In 2008, more overdose deaths were attributable to prescription painkillers than to cocaine and heroin combined.² Additionally, the number of emergency room visits attributable to prescription painkiller misuse more than doubled between 2004 and 2009.

National Trends

Nationally, more than 12 million people reported using prescription drugs for nonmedical purposes in 2010, including 2 million first-time users. That is a 40% increase over the 7 million reports in the previous year.³ The trend of prescription drug abuse among children and teenagers continues to be among the most disturbing. As of 2009, prescription drugs were second only to marijuana as far as categories of drugs most abused by youth.⁴ In New York City alone, 10% of all seventh to twelfth grade students reported in 2008 abusing prescription opioid drugs for nonmedical purposes at least once.⁵

According to the CDC, there were enough prescription painkillers prescribed in 2010 to medicate all American adults around-the-clock for a month, and the quantity of prescription painkillers sold to pharmacies, hospitals and medical offices was four times larger than it was ten years earlier.⁶ Furthermore, the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) reports that the milligram per person use of prescription opioid drugs increased by 402 percent—from 74 milligrams to 368 milligrams—between 1997 and 2007.⁷

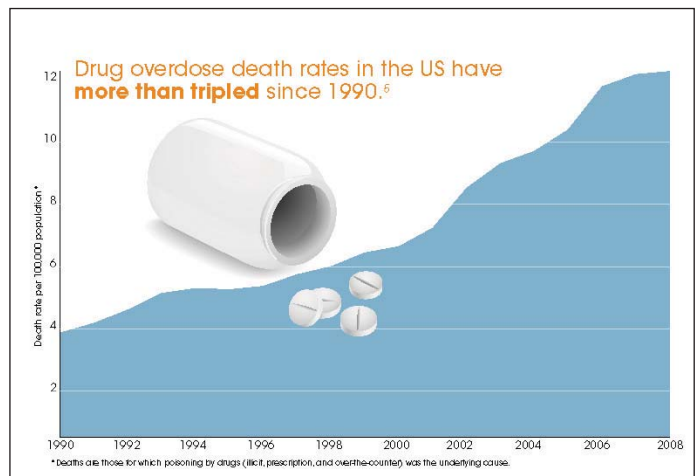
These figures paint a bleak picture for New York City that will only get worse unless we strongly confront and thwart the growing prescription drug abuse epidemic. The Office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor is committed to achieving this goal. In 2011, we created a new Prescription Drug Investigations Unit dedicated to investigating and prosecuting the criminal distribution of prescription drugs. We increased our focus on prevention and cutting off the supply of prescription drugs that end up on the black market. This includes investigating medical facilities and doctors who illegally sell prescriptions.

Skyrocketing Referrals

This renewed focus on targeting the sources of prescription drug diversion and abuse is already proving successful. Since the formation of the Prescription Drug Investigation Unit, we have been inundated with referrals from every imaginable source. We continue to work closely with the investigators from the New York State Bureau of Narcotic Enforcement, who bring us cases on a regular basis. Our partnerships with the NYPD and the DEA are also vital.

We are scrambling to keep up with these daily referrals. Legislators have reported questionable pharmacies and suspected pill mills in their districts. Physicians and physician's office managers have called with concerns

According to data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention, prescription drug overdose deaths across the country have now surpassed automobile fatalities.



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

about “doctor shoppers” whom they believe are filling prescriptions in order to sell the pills on the black market. Pharmacists have reported forged prescriptions. Hospital security units have reported theft of prescription pads. Tips have come from confidential informants and private citizens who call to report suspected criminal activity in their neighborhoods. It appears that the public has woken up to the severity of the prescriptions drug epidemic and we are doing everything we can to respond.

- 1 New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Opioid Analgesics in New York City: Misuse, Morbidity and Mortality Update, Epi Data Brief, No. 3, April 2011.
- 2 CDC, Policy Impact: Prescription Painkiller Overdoses, November 2011.
- 3 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), 2009 & 2010 National Survey on Drug Use and Health.
- 4 University of Michigan, 2009 Monitoring the Future Survey.
- 5 New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Opioid Analgesics in New York City: Misuse, Morbidity and Mortality Update, Epi Data Brief, No. 3, April 2011.
- 6 CDC, Prescription Painkiller Overdoses in the US, Vital Signs, November 2011.
- 7 ONDCP 2011 Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention Plan, Epidemic: Responding to America’s Prescription Drug Abuse Crisis (citing Manchikanti, Fellow, Ailinani & Pampati, Therapeutic Use, Abuse, and Nonmedical Use of Opioids: A Ten-Year Perspective, Pain Physician, 13:401-435.2010).

Funding

Funding

In FY 2013, our combined total reduction in projected city, state and federal funding is \$1,204,378 or 6.7%. For a small agency, such a funding loss in one year would render us unable to fulfill our statutory duties.

Loss in City Funding:

We lost \$713,807 in city cash funds or 4.5% in fiscal 2012. These cash funds were received in 2011 from the City Council, OMB cash restoration, and DA revenue funding. Unlike the other DA offices, we got neither the baseline increases nor any revenue funds to offset this cash loss. Instead, we used one-time federal cash infusions totaling over \$600,000 to retain our crucial staff and keep operations running. Unfortunately, these federal cash funds will not be renewed in fiscal 2013 therefore creating a large shortfall for next year.

In addition to the drastic loss in City funding, as mentioned previously, we were also challenged by the rise of prescription drug epidemic in fiscal 2012. By last fall, recognizing the seriousness of the prescription drug problem and our dire financial situation, OMB granted our new needs request and funded our prescription drug unit and safe neighborhood initiative. Without their support, we would not have had the resources to combat these important areas.

State Reductions:

Overall, we foresee a reduction in state funding of 35% or over \$440,000 in FY 2013. Our state Aid to Prosecution grant and Drug Treatment Alternative to Prison Program (DTAP) are projected to be reduced by 20% in FY 2013. We must also assume that Narcotics Gang Unit and Crimes Against Revenue Program funding will not be renewed next year. Added together, these cuts amount to a 35% reduction in our state funding in fiscal 2013.

Federal Funding:

Though we are grateful for the one-time cash infusion in federal stimulus and reimbursement funding, our long-term and recurring federal grant fund has plummeted by a staggering 81% or \$557,468, from \$687,468 in 2002 to \$130,000 in FY 2012. The only federal funding remaining is the Byrne Justice Assistance Grant, which continues to diminish each year. Given the amount of federal cuts in FY 2013, the chances of our JAG funding being renewed is getting even slimmer.

OSNP Total Funding Reductions	
Fiscal 2011 - Fiscal 2013	
	Amount
OSNP FY 2011 Modified Budget	\$ 17,897,742
Actual FY 2012 Changes	
City Funding Reductions	(161,753)
State Funding Reductions	(148,166)
Federal Funding Reductions	193,367
Total	(116,552)
OSNP FY 2012 Modified Budget	\$ 17,781,190
Projected FY 2013 Changes	
City Funding Reductions	(71,023)
State Funding Reductions	(442,820)
Federal Funding Reductions	(690,535)
Total	\$ (1,204,378)
OSNP FY 2013 Projected Budget	16,576,812

Case Highlights

Doctor Arrested for Selling Prescriptions to Overdose Victim

A physician was arrested for illegally selling prescriptions for controlled substances from a pain management clinic he operated in Flushing, Queens. Following a year-long investigation, Dr. Stan Xuhui Li was indicted on 15 counts of Criminal Sale of a Prescription for a Controlled Substance and 5 counts of Reckless Endangerment in the 2nd degree in November. The charges stem from the illegal sale of prescriptions to Michael Cornetta, a Queens resident who received dozens of prescriptions for multiple controlled substances from the physician between May 2009 and August 2010. Cornetta overdosed at least twice during this time period and ultimately died of an overdose in November 2010 at the age of 40.

In addition to the Cornetta case, Special Narcotics is investigating Li's sale of prescriptions to other patients, including at least nine individuals who suffered fatal drug overdoses since January 2009. Li saw approximately 90 patients each day at the Flushing clinic, Medical Pain Management, which was open on Saturdays and the occasional Sunday. During the week, Li worked full-time as an anesthesiologist at a hospital in New Jersey. Immediately following his arrest, the New Jersey hospital suspended his clinical privileges. Subsequently, the New York State Health Department's Board of Professional Medical Conduct filed disciplinary charges against Li and suspended his license to practice medicine in New York pending a hearing.

Pills, Cocaine and Weapons Seized from Staten Island Home

A drug trafficker whose Staten Island home served as a heavily-fortified stash house was arrested on drug and weapons charges in March. Brando Franco was apprehended after federal agents with ICE Newark observed him conduct a drug sale with his girlfriend and another man in Sayerville, N.J. Franco was under surveillance at the time. Agents searched a white Lexus belonging to Franco's girlfriend and found a 40 caliber pistol. Franco subsequently consented to a search of his house in the Pleasant Plains section of Staten Island, where agents found two additional guns – an AR-15 rifle and a 9 mm pistol – as well as body armor, ski masks and sophisticated surveillance equipment. Approximately 3,000 oxycodone pills, 30 grams of cocaine, and quantities of alprazolam (the generic name for Xanax) and anabolic steroids were also stashed in the home. A framed poster of Al Pacino's "Scarface" hung prominently on the wall.



A Staten Island drug trafficker sold pills from his home, which he protected with weapons and a sophisticated security system.

International Drug Pipeline Cut: Dozens of Kilos and 22 Guns

A six-month wiretap investigation into a violent narcotics trafficking organization led DEA agents to seize 22 kilos of heroin (48.4 lbs.) in New York City, and 32 kilos of cocaine (74.8 lbs.) and a large arsenal of weapons hidden in a suspect's home in Texas. Intercepted phone calls revealed that drug kingpin Naldy Rodriguez, who headed the New York arm of the organization, travelled to Mexico to arrange for narcotics to be purchased and smuggled across the border to Texas. Agents seized a 32-kilo load of cocaine in Texas as it was being transported to New York for distribution in January 2011. Three months later, the DEA New York Division arrested Rodriguez and conducted court authorized searches of his home and stash houses in Yonkers and the Bronx. Agents seized 22 kilos of heroin, two guns and \$100,000 cash, as well as expensive jewelry, a Bentley automobile and several other luxury vehicles.

During the probe, dubbed Operation Hard Promises, Rodriguez's supplier was identified as a Gulf cartel associate operating out of Houston, Texas. Agents in Texas executed court authorized searches in one related residence and recovered an arsenal of 20 tactical military-grade guns, as well as thousands of rounds of ammunition and high-capacity magazines. A total of six defendants were indicted in New York. Rodriguez is charged with Operating as a Major Drug Trafficker.

Massive "Crystal Meth" Seizure: Manufactured in Mexico

Two drug kingpins were indicted following the record-breaking seizure of 51 pounds of methamphetamine and 5 kilos (11 lbs.) of heroin worth approximately \$6.5 million. The massive load of drugs was intercepted by the New York Drug Enforcement Task Force at New Jersey's Vince Lombardi Service Area off Interstate 95 (I-95) in July. The seizure of methamphetamine, "crystal meth," was the region's largest in recent years. Worth approximately \$4.8 million, it was five times the size of the total amount of methamphetamine seized by the DEA's New York Field Division in all of 2010.

The drug shipment originated in Mexico and was transported through Texas to New Jersey by tractor trailer. A total of four drug traffickers were arrested at the Service Area, including two charged under New York's Operating as a Major Trafficker statute. Jose Mauro Mota, a major distributor for the eastern seaboard, was overseeing transfer of the shipment from the truck to another vehicle when the investigators swooped in. Deivis Rafael Ceballos, a resident of Spring, Tex. who was in charge of making transportation arrangements for the load, was arrested as he moved a suitcase containing 41 pounds of methamphetamine from the tractor trailer to a car.

\$1 Million Cocaine Shipment to Kingpin at Times Square Hotel

A 10-month wiretap investigation culminated in the seizure of a \$1 million cocaine shipment and the indictment of 10 narcotics traffickers, including a major Puerto Rican drug kingpin. Ricardo Gonzalez-Santiago was arrested moments after he picked up two suitcases stuffed with 36 kilos (79 lbs.) of cocaine at the Paramount Hotel on West 46th Street,



A car transporting 32 kilos of cocaine to New York was stopped in Texas.



A suitcase packed with 41 pounds of "crystal meth" was transported from Texas in a tractor trailer.

in the heart of Times Square. Unbeknownst to Gonzalez-Santiago, members of the NYPD's Vice Squad and the DEA-led New York Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Strike Force had placed him under surveillance earlier that day when he arrived in the New York from Puerto Rico. Gonzalez-Santiago was charged with Operating as a Major Drug Trafficker. The investigation began with street-level sales of ketamine, ecstasy and oxycodone at Manhattan nightclubs, such as Webster Hall and Pacha NYC.

1,000 Oxycodone Pills Mailed from the Dominican Republic

DEA agents seized 1,000 oxycodone pills and arrested two men during a wiretap investigation. Prior to the arrests, intercepted phone calls revealed that a suspect was brokering a deal between a drug supplier and a customer. The customer was prepared to start ordering up to 3,000 pills per day at a price of approximately \$6.50 per pill. The oxycodone is believed to have been sent from the Dominican Republic to New York via the mail. Agents seized the 1,000 pills and \$6,300 cash when the broker and one of the supplier's workers met to conduct a drug transaction on Jerome Avenue in the Bronx. Both men were arrested.

Teacher's Aide Arrested for Pill Sale on Craigslist

A New York City teacher's aide was arrested for selling Adderal pills on Craigslist in December. An undercover officer responded to a coded advertisement for Adderal that Mariel Javier had posted on the Craigslist site. Javier set up a meeting with the undercover at 96th Street and 2nd Avenue via text messages. The undercover entered Javier's vehicle and bought three tablets of Adderal for \$60. At that point, Javier was placed under arrest. A search of the car yielded an additional 16 Adderal pills. Javier was charged with Criminal Sale of a Controlled Substance and Criminal Diversion of Prescription Medications.

Dentist Stole and Forged Pain Medication Prescriptions

A Brooklyn dentist was arrested for stealing more than 150 prescription sheets from his employer and forging the prescriptions to obtain controlled substances. Andrew Hechtman used the prescriptions to obtain Vicodin, Percocet and other medications over a two-year period from November 2009 to November 2011. The prescriptions were filled at multiple pharmacies. Hechtman's scheme unraveled when his insurance company grew suspicious and contacted the dentist's employer, whose name appeared on the forgeries. The employer fired Hechtman and reported him to authorities. Hechtman is currently charged in connection with four instances of forgery and illegally obtaining prescription drugs. The investigation is ongoing.

43 Members of Two Warring Gangs Indicted in Brooklyn

The Narcotics Gang Unit and the NYPD conducted a long-term



A wiretap investigation revealed drug traffickers in the Dominican Republic shipped oxycodone pills by mail.

investigation into two warring gangs – the Hoodstarz and the Wave Gang – that terrorized residents of Brownsville, Brooklyn. Gang members were responsible for at least six murders and 32 shootings during an 18-month period. The young gangsters, many of whom were in their teens late teens and early 20s, used coded language to communicate with one another through social media, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. The investigation culminated in the indictment of 43 gang members by the Kings County District Attorney’s Office. Special Narcotics prosecutors developed significant evidence on the groups, and worked with the Kings County District Attorney which secured the indictments.

Members of the Hoodstarz carried out numerous brazen acts of violence under the direction of their leader, Culture Bermudez, in order to maintain their turf. It was not uncommon for innocent bystanders to get caught in the crossfire of this bloody rivalry. Communal firearms and ammunition were stored at several locations, including the family home of one of the Hoodstarz’s top lieutenants. Known as the “Trap,” the home became the main place where the Hoodstarz met to discuss business and to use marijuana and narcotics. Even after Hoodstarz leaders were arrested, they continued to give orders from behind bars and were kept abreast of arrests of members and acts of retribution violence, such as beatings, shootings and homicides against members of the rival Wave Gang.

Upper West Side: Cocaine, Ecstasy, Oxycodone and Guns

A court authorized search of an apartment on West 87th Street in Manhattan led to the seizure of over four kilograms of cocaine (8.8 lbs.), 879 ecstasy pills, and a quantity of oxycodone pills in February. Three loaded semi-automatic handguns were also recovered in the search by the DEA’s New York Drug Enforcement Task Force. Agents conducted the search after they encountered Edwin Diaz as he left the apartment, which had been identified as a possible drug stash house. Diaz was carrying a small amount of cocaine, ecstasy and oxycodone at the time. The stash apartment was located on the same block as a high school and a home for the elderly.

Brooklyn Woman Arrested for Forged Prescriptions

A Brooklyn woman was arrested after she attempted to fill a bogus prescription for oxycodone at a Bay Ridge, Brooklyn pharmacy. The pharmacist grew suspicious of Theresa Giovannucci when she presented an error-riddled prescription sheet for 180 tablets of 30 mg-strength oxycodone. A call to the Staten Island doctor’s office listed on the prescription confirmed the pharmacist’s suspicions. The physician said his office had not issued the prescription to Giovannucci and the DEA and New York State license numbers on the prescription sheet proved to be invalid. The pharmacist refused to fill the prescription and reported Giovannucci to authorities.

When detectives with the NYPD’s Narcotics Borough Brooklyn South responded to the pharmacy, they learned that Giovannucci



Gang members in Brownsville, Brooklyn were behind six murders and 32 shootings.

New York Daily News



Narcotics and weapons were seized from an apartment on West 87th Street.

had successfully filled another prescription for 180 tablets of 30 mg-strength oxycodone a few months earlier. That prescription, also a forgery, purportedly came from a Brooklyn doctor's office. Detectives then went to the Coney Island address the pharmacy had on file for Giovannucci and arrested her outside her home. She is charged with two counts of Criminal Possession of a Forged Instrument and one count each of Criminal Possession of a Controlled Substance and Attempted Criminal Possession of a Controlled Substance.

Inwood Heroin Mill Dismantled: Two Guns Seized

Over three kilos of heroin (6.6 lbs.) and two guns were seized from a heroin mill at 5025 Broadway in the Inwood section of Manhattan following a long-term investigation. Six mill workers were busily packaging heroin into glassine envelopes in an apartment when members of the New York Drug Enforcement Task Force arrived to conduct the search. The startled workers upended a table – sending loose heroin power flying across the living room – and attempted to flee. They made it only so far as the bathroom, where the agents apprehended all six. Police also recovered heroin from the kitchen table and cabinets. Additional heroin and a handgun were recovered from a “trap” in a dresser in the bedroom, while a second gun was found in a hallway closet. The heroin was stamped with various brand names, including “Bat,” “Call Me” and “Speed.”



Mill workers upended a table covered with heroin as DEA agents arrived to arrest them.

Correction Officer Promised Inmate Freedom for Drugs

A Corrections Officer with the New York City Department of Corrections and an accomplice were arrested on charges of bribe receiving and drug possession. Robert Whitfield, a veteran officer assigned to Rikers Island, was taken into custody in April following a long-term investigation. Authorities learned that Whitfield had attempted to solicit a bribe from an inmate at Rikers Island, promising he could secure the inmate's early release in exchange for cash or drugs. A DEA agent posed as the inmate's intermediary and made plans to deliver 3 kilos (6 ½ lbs.) of cocaine to Whitfield. The Corrections Officer sent a representative to pick up the drugs. As soon as the drugs changed hands, investigators from the DEA Strike Force and Department of Investigation arrested both the representative and Whitfield, who was in his vehicle two blocks away.

Over \$5 Million in Heroin Seized: Bronx Mill Dismantled

Two men were arrested for their roles in one of the largest heroin trafficking operations in the metropolitan area following a long-term investigation. New York State Police investigators seized approximately 18 ½ kilos of heroin (40 lbs.) with a street value of more than \$5 million in the Gun Hill section of the Bronx. Francisco Ramirez and Andy Moscat were arrested and indicted in February after investigators observed them pick up a large duffle bag loaded with heroin from 2526 Bronx Park East. Searches of a heroin mill inside the building and the pair's residences yielded a loaded 9 mm Beretta handgun, approximately \$38,000 and drug packaging equipment.



A staggering 40 pounds of heroin was seized along with a gun and masks

NYC Drug Workers Commuted to NJ Heroin Mill

Over \$1.5 million in heroin was seized and 10 drug traffickers were arrested at a heroin mill in Fort Lee, N.J. A two-month investigation revealed that drug workers were transported across the George Washington Bridge from Washington Heights in Manhattan to the mill in a newly constructed two-family house on a quiet residential street. The workers spent their shifts cutting the heroin and packaging it into glassine envelopes in a room off the garage. A man and his girlfriend who controlled the packaging mill were among those arrested in February. Their preschool-aged daughter was in the house at the time agents arrived to conduct the court authorized search. The mother had been stamping brand names onto glassine bags at the kitchen table, while the child sat next to her eating breakfast and watching cartoons. A court authorized search yielded 2.5 kilos (over 6 lbs.) of unprocessed heroin and more than 100,000 user-ready glassine envelopes, as well as \$50,000 in cash. The glassines bore names like “Roger Dat” and “True Love.” The case was referred to the Passaic County Prosecutor’s Office.



A two-family home on a quiet, residential street in New Jersey served as a heroin mill.

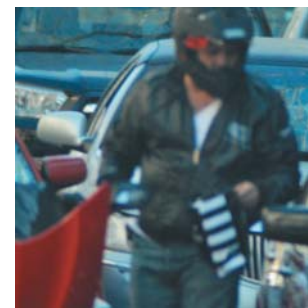
Two Rival Drug Crews Targeted in East New York: 28 Arrested

A long-term investigation in East New York, Brooklyn led to the arrests of 28 drug traffickers, including members of two rival crews that peddled crack cocaine and marijuana. Undercover detectives with the NYPD’s Narcotics Borough Brooklyn North purchased drugs from the two groups on approximately 200 occasions. The investigation targeted drug trafficking in a neighborhood that has been plagued by violence, including a string of brazen shootings that may have stemmed from the dispute between the two rival crews. Drug traffickers conducted their illicit business inside a neighborhood Chinese restaurant, a barber shop and a bodega, among other locations.

Park Slope Heroin Dealers Targeted in Operation Sin City

Four loosely-linked drug trafficking rings that operated in Park Slope, Brooklyn were dismantled following a year-long investigation by the NYPD’s Narcotics Borough Brooklyn South Major Case Team and the DEA. The probe involved the sale of over \$70,000 in narcotics to undercover officers and resulted in a dozen arrests. Many sales took place in broad daylight on tony brownstone-lined streets.

The main target of the investigation, Edwin Perez, sold heroin from a bright red, three-wheeled Can-Am Spyder motorcycle, which he used to navigate traffic in the leafy neighborhood. Perez frequently sold heroin from a location he referred to as “the office,” near Prospect Park. In one brazen sale at “the office,” Perez pulled alongside an undercover officer’s car and handed a Sephora bag packed with 2,000 glassines of heroin through the window. Perez received \$10,000 cash in exchange. At the time of Perez’s arrest in April, police seized approximately 1,400 glassines of heroin from a compartment in his motorcycle, as well as a helmet emblazoned with the name “Sin City,” which is one of the brands of heroin sold during the investigation. Perez’s home on 19th Street was fortified and equipped with a sophisticated security system.



The head of a heroin trafficking ring in Park Slope made drug deliveries on a red three-wheeled motorcycle.

Prescription Drugs Sold from Car in Murray Hill

A prescription drug trafficker who set up shop at the corner of 2nd Avenue and 41st Street in the Murray Hill section of Manhattan was arrested after he sold oxycodone pills to an undercover officer and another customer. The NYPD became aware of Alexander Mesh after neighbors complained about drug activity in a white Toyota parked near the busy intersection. Detectives conducted surveillance and observed a drug customer enter the car and exit a short time later. The detectives stopped the customer and retrieved five oxycodone pills. Subsequently, an undercover officer posing as another customer approached Mesh's car, climbed inside and purchased six oxycodone pills. Mesh, a resident of Brighton Beach, Brooklyn, was immediately placed under arrest. A search yielded approximately 440 oxycodone pills and 134 Xanax pills stashed inside the center console of the car. Mesh also had a zip of marijuana hidden in a Pringles and \$1,200 cash in his possession. An indictment charges Mesh with multiple counts of Criminal Sale of a Controlled Substance and Criminal Possession of a Controlled Substance.

South Williamsburg Heroin Supply Disrupted

A heroin ring that supplied dealers in South Williamsburg, Brooklyn, was put out of business in August. An NYPD investigation revealed that the vast majority of heroin sold in South Williamsburg came from a single heroin mill in Glendale, Queens. NYPD officers conducted a court authorized search of the apartment that housed the mill and seized over a kilo of heroin, as well as all of the equipment necessary to process the drug and package it for distribution. At the time of the early morning search, police arrested a total of five mill workers, three of whom were sleeping on the living room floor. Work stations had been set up around the room and the workers had filled approximately 25,000 glassine envelopes with heroin before going to sleep. Another half-kilo of heroin was still in the loose powder form, waiting to be packaged. The glassines were stamped with the brand "NOS" – the name of an engine booster used in drag racing. Also seized were an inoperable .9 mm semi-automatic firearm and nearly \$6,000 cash.

Red Hook Heroin Mill Dismantled

A heroin trafficker who operated a drug packaging mill in an up-and-coming section of Red Hook, Brooklyn was arrested in October. The Van Brunt Street garage that housed Hector Lorenzo's heroin business sat amidst cafés, boutiques and trendy bars that had recently moved to the area. During a court authorized search of Lorenzo's mill, police seized approximately \$50,000 in heroin, as well as drug processing equipment, 25 Xanax pills and quantities of marijuana.

New York Daily News



A heroin mill in Queens supplied drug users in Williamsburg, Brooklyn.



A heroin trafficker branded glassine envelopes with a wide variety of names.

Two Bronx Heroin Mills Shuttered: \$400,000 in Drugs Seized

A pair of heroin mills was dismantled in the tree-lined Pelham Parkway section of the Bronx in December following a two-month investigation by the New York Drug Enforcement Task Force. Six drug traffickers were arrested and approximately 39,000 glassine envelopes of heroin worth nearly \$400,000 were seized. The glassines were stamped with the brand name "BlackBerry" alongside a picture of a phone. During the investigation, DEA agents and NYPD detectives observed members of the ring carrying blankets to conceal packages of drugs that were wrapped inside.

10 lbs. of Marijuana Seized from Celebrity Photographer

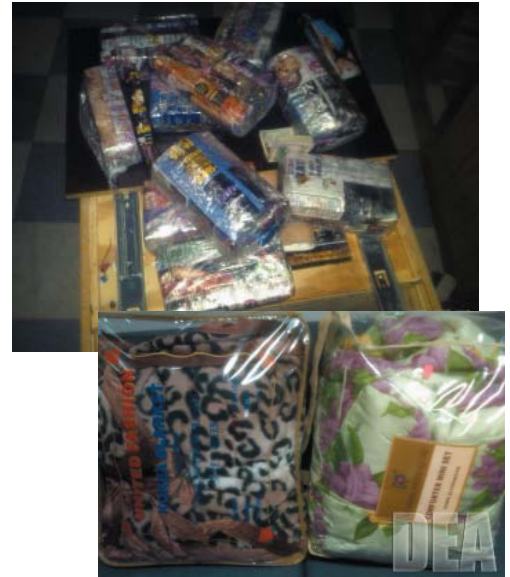
A celebrity photographer was arrested after fire marshals stumbled across a 10-pound stash of marijuana in her kitchen while investigating a fire in her SoHo apartment building. Jennifer Tzar was charged with Criminal Possession of Marijuana in the 1st degree. A fire marshal smelled a strong odor of marijuana when he entered the apartment and found two open laundry bags stuffed with large plastic bags of marijuana in the kitchen and bedroom. A jar of marijuana was also sitting on a table in her bedroom and \$8,835 cash was lying on the bed.

Chelsea Gangs Sold Heroin, Cocaine, Oxycodone and Guns

The NYPD's Manhattan South Narcotics Division conducted a major operation in the Chelsea Houses following community complaints of gang-related violence and drug activity in the New York City Housing Authority Complex. In August, police arrested five members of a drug ring for peddling two guns and nearly \$11,400 in heroin, cocaine, crack and oxycodone pills to undercover. The main defendant, Epifanio Santiago, brought his infant daughter along on one sale, and stashed the drugs inside the baby's stroller and diaper bag. Santiago sold over 200 glassines of heroin and 2 ounces of highly-pure cocaine for \$4,000 in that exchange. Over the past year, an NYPD initiative resulted in the arrests of over 30 drug traffickers in the vicinity of the Chelsea Houses, including a dozen members of the Bloods and Crips gangs. A total of three handguns and a shotgun were recovered.

Ten drug traffickers arrested at Brooklyn's Lafayette Gardens

Ten drug traffickers were arrested for selling crack cocaine, heroin and marijuana to undercover officers on nearly 20 occasions in the Lafayette Gardens, a New York City Housing Authority complex, and the surrounding area of Clinton Hill, Brooklyn. Drug sales took place in public hallways, lobbies and stairwells of residential buildings, as well as outdoor courtyards. In launching the investigation, dubbed "Operation Cash Gardens," the NYPD responded to community complaints about drug traffickers intimidating residents, and the presence of narcotics and weapons inside the buildings. The neighborhood was plagued with shootings and a rash of burglaries and robberies.



Police watched as members of a drug crew purchase blankets that were later used to conceal bundles of heroin.



A drug trafficker hid narcotics in stroller with toddler.