

*** NEWS RELEASE ***
SALINAS MAN SENTENCED
IN FELONY PRESCRIPTION FORGERY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Monterey County District Attorney Dean D. Flippo announced today that on January 19, 2016, Salinas resident, Johnny Morales, age 22, was sentenced by Judge Julie R. Culver for forging and altering a narcotic prescription from a stolen prescription pad. The defendant was placed on three years of felony probation, ordered to serve 111 days in custody for this violation, and register as a narcotics offender. He was on felony probation when he committed this offense. He was placed on felony probation on February 26, 2013, for three years, for permitting a loaded firearm in a vehicle.

During the month of December, 2015, on three separate occasions, the defendant went into the Rite Aid Pharmacy in King City and used forged prescriptions, from a stolen prescription pad, taken from Natividad Medical Center. He sought to obtain Phenergan with codeine, a promethazine-codeine cough syrup. The pharmacist suspected the prescription was fraudulent and confirmed the invalidity by the physician on the prescription.

Promethazine-codeine cough syrup, a medication that contains codeine, is an opioid that acts as a cough suppressant and can also produce relaxation and euphoria when consumed at a higher-than-prescribed dose. It also contains promethazine HCl, an antihistamine that additionally acts as a sedative. Although only available by prescription, promethazine-codeine cough syrup is sometimes diverted for abuse. When abused, promethazine-codeine cough syrup presents a high risk of fatal overdose due to its effect of depressing the central nervous system, which can slow or stop the heart and lungs. Mixing with alcohol greatly increases this risk. Promethazine-codeine cough syrup has been linked to the overdose deaths of a few prominent celebrities. Less grave symptoms include nausea, dizziness, impaired vision, memory loss, hallucinations, and seizures. Young people may think that just because something is available from the pharmacy, it won't harm them—but that's not true. When not used as directed on the label, cough and cold medicines can be highly addictive and dangerous.

This case was investigated by King City Police Officer Kip Bowen. This case was handled by the Healthcare Fraud Unit of the Monterey County District Attorney's Office. This unit aggressively investigates and prosecutes prescription drug fraud and healthcare insurance fraud in Monterey County. The unit also investigates and prosecutes other cases to include, but not limited to: use of another's identity to secure healthcare benefits; embezzlement; unlawful solicitations/referrals; fraudulent billing; inflated or falsified pharmacy billings; prescription fraud and abuse; out-patient surgery center fraud; Medi-Cal fraud and fraudulent disability claims.

If you suspect healthcare fraud of any kind you are encouraged to immediately call the Monterey County District Attorney's healthcare fraud hotline at 831-755-3224.