



HELP SOUGHT: Attorney General Charlie Crist, left, speaks to Teresa Ashcraft, whose son, Bobby, died from overdosing on OxyContin. "People are dying from these drugs, and we have to stop it," Ashcraft said. AP photo/Steve Cannon

Parents: Prevent drug abuse

New state controls on use of narcotics urged at hearing in Tallahassee.

BY JOHN KENNEDY
TALLAHASSEE BUREAU

TALLAHASSEE • Parents armed with posters of their dead children came to a drug symposium Wednesday at the state Capitol focused on skyrocketing prescription drug abuse in the state.

Teresa Ashcraft, of DeBary, brought a shot of her 19-year-old son Bobby Ashcraft in a tuxedo, scrawled with the handwritten message: "OxyContin killed his future."

"It doesn't matter if you live in a slum or a pillared mansion," said Ashcraft, a cafeteria manager with the Volusia County school system. "People are dying from these drugs, and we have to stop it."

The symposium, which drew Gov.

Jeb Bush, Attorney General Charlie Crist, and state and national drug experts, was the latest in a series of efforts aimed at rallying support to curb prescription-drug abuse, which officials said is killing an average of five Floridians a day.

"This is a horrible situation that we need to deal with, and we will," Bush said.

Turning to the half-dozen parents lining a front row at the hearing, Bush said their presence "puts a human face on an issue that is so painful, for so many families in this state."

Barbara Waldron, of Palm Beach Gardens, grew tearful when recalling her daughter, Blair, who struggled for years with depression before dying last February of a fatal mix of Xanax, an anti-anxiety medication, cocaine and heroin, just hours after being released from the hospital.

Maryann Carey, of Delray Beach, remembered her son Steven, 25, as a free spirit, who used cocaine, Xanax and Oxycontin, a narcotic pain relief-

er, the night he died. "He was a party person," Carey said. "They called themselves the weekend warriors. But he didn't get his drugs through prescription. They're on the streets."

The grieving parents said they thought legislation now in the works could have helped spare their children.

The legislation would create a new prescription-tracking database, financed partly by Purdue Pharma, the Connecticut maker of OxyContin. The *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* has reported that deaths in Florida from prescription drugs were topping those from illegal drugs and that state regulators have largely failed to curb runaway Medicaid prescription costs for pain-relief patches, sleeping pills, tranquilizers and other highly abused drugs.

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