

Committee: Special Committee

Topic: The question of the sale of fraudulent medicines in the black market



Source: <http://www.engineersjournal.ie/2014/01/30/is-there-an-end-in-sight-for-counterfeit-drugs/>

<b>Committee:</b>	Special Committee
<b>Issue:</b>	The question of the sale of fraudulent medicines in the black market
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<b>Position:</b>	Committee Chair

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## Introduction

Fraudulent medicines (counterfeit drugs) are drugs or medication which are labelled incorrectly with the explicit purpose of misleading customers. Often, this means drugs which have manipulated expiration dates, wrong dosages, and/or contain no active ingredients. The black market for fraudulent medicine is a very lucrative business for criminals, and are particularly prevalent in areas where crucially necessary drugs are unobtainable expensive for the general population. Ergo, while only about 1% of the medicine purchased in the UK is counterfeit, this number can reach as high at 10%-30% in some developing countries.

## The Problem

As counterfeit drugs are illegal, there are no rules or regulations, and so the drugs are of then produced with the main purpose of looking like a real drug with little regard for quality or effectiveness of the drugs themselves.

The most commonly counterfeited drugs are antibiotics, especially in countries where real antibiotics are relatively expensive. In high-income countries, many 'lifestyle' medicines such as medications for weight loss and to combat erectile dysfunctions populate the black markets. In Africa, the most common black-market drug is fake malaria medication. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime stated that in 2013, up to 73% of the evaluated anti-malarial medication in Nigeria was substandard. Additionally, prescription drugs which tend to be very expensive, such as treatment for AIDs or Cancer, are great business for counterfeiters.

The main issue with fraudulent medicine is that the producers do not care about what the drugs contain or how they are made. Because of this, lots of counterfeit drugs pose a significant health risk to their consumers. These drugs have been found to contain

ingredients such as corn starch, potato starch or chalk or even other toxic ingredients or toxic levels of the wrong active ingredient. They also pose risk of containing bacteria and other impurities. Counterfeit drugs, in the best case scenario, can prolong illnesses, but in the worst case scenario, can permanently harm and even kill. Another major issue is the prevalence of fraudulent antibiotics, which assist the spread of 'superbugs', which are bugs that have antimicrobial resistance.

The production of fraudulent medication is on the rise, particularly because of the rise of online purchase of medicine. In fact, WHO states that counterfeits have been increasing by a factor of 10 over the last decade.

Counterfeit drugs are a problem all over the world, whether they are spread through people buying medication on vacation and then bringing them back home, or with online retailers concealing their true locations.

## Why is the issue so prevalent?

Multiple key factors have been identified that have contributed to a great extent in making counterfeiting possible, such as:

- lack of political will
- absent or weak national drug regulating authority
- inadequate legislations or loopholes in existing legislations
- poor cooperation among different stakeholders
- lucrative business due to continued high demand for medicines and low production costs
- lack of awareness about ill-effects of counterfeit medicines among the general community/health care professionals/pharmacists
- poor socioeconomic status
- health illiteracy
- globalization and free trade policies
- availability of medicines outside conventional and government-regulated networks viz., internet pharmacies

## Major Parties Involved

As counterfeiting is a global problem, cross-border cooperation is necessary. Non-affiliated organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), The Institute of Research Against Counterfeit Medicines (IRACM), and International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers & Associations (IFPMA) are key players in the fight against fraudulent drugs. Organizations like this cooperate with more local organizations such as the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) in the UK, and the respective governments.

# Some key numbers from *The Telegraph*

- **1 in 10 drugs** sold in the developing world are thought to be fake.
- Up to **169,000 children** may be dying every year from pneumonia because of fake drugs.
- An estimated **116,000 people** die from malaria every year because of substandard falsified medicines.
- They cost health systems **\$38.5m** a year.
- **42 %** of counterfeit medications are found in Africa.
- In 2017 **25m** illicit medicines worth **\$51m** were seized worldwide.

## What Measures are Currently in Place?

### Legislation

**February 2016** - European Parliament announced new measures to tackle counterfeit medicine, which will take effect in 2019, including requirements for new safety features on packaging for at-risk medicine. This includes:

- Unique identifiers to be placed on medicinal products that can be scanned at fixed points along the supply chain
- Tamper evident features on the pack

**July 2012** - Japan Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association (JPMA) published a joint statement with the other major pharmaceutical industry associations, IFPMA, PhRMA and EFPIA, to support and encourage the efforts by national and international government organizations to reduce the illegal sale of medicines by illegitimate online drug sellers that endanger public health.

### Other

Many awareness campaigns, such as the Bayer “Beware of Counterfeits” campaign, which includes information events and different product brochures and flyers to educate people on how to avoid counterfeits.

**June 2016** - 103 countries worked together on the most recent “Pangea” operation coordinated by INTERPOL; “Pangea IX”. The operation led to 393 arrests worldwide, the suspension of 4,932 illegal websites and the seizure of over 12 million counterfeit and illicit medicines with an approximate value of \$53 million.

# Possible Solutions

To combat counterfeit medicines, some measures that governments can take include, but are not limited to:

- Obtaining an exact estimate of the nature and extent of the counterfeit drugs problem in the country so that scarcely distributed resources can be utilized to the optimal extent
- Formulating a comprehensive policy to address all the potential threats in the field of counterfeit medicine market
- Actively involving all stakeholders namely health authorities, drug regulatory authorities, wholesalers, retailers, police, customs, judiciary, pharmaceutical industry and patients in the strategy
- Creating awareness among the population regarding generic drugs and the dangers of the illicit medicines with the help of appropriate mass media aids is of paramount importance
- Designing appropriate laws with the help of legal department and facilitating their strict enforcement; providing legal assistance to the consumers; and employment of strict pharmacovigilance mechanisms
- Organizing training sessions for the benefit of pharmacists and health care professionals in different aspects of counterfeiting
- Building of a network to strengthen collaborative activities at local, district, regional, national and international levels; and ensuring continuous monitoring and evaluation of implemented measures
- Adoption of newer technologies like use of cost-effective electrophoresis devices/more sophisticated devices for warranting quality assurance of drugs
- Regulating drug prices so that lower income consumers do not have to resort to black market medicines

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