

Counterfeit Drugs: Towards an Irish Response to a Global Crisis

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Executive Summary

Ireland has benefited greatly from authentic pharmaceuticals. They contribute to both individual's health and the economy. Counterfeit drugs can seriously undermine both areas. Counterfeit drugs cause much death and suffering around the world. Different strategies are used to sell counterfeit drugs in developed and developing countries. Either way, they provide substantial incomes to unscrupulous individuals and organizations. The problem is global. It requires a coordinated global response.

Counterfeit drugs are defined in different ways. This creates difficulties in evaluating and policing trade in counterfeit drugs. A global definition needs to be accepted so that the problem can be tackled efficiently and globally. An important step towards this is on the horizon through the International Framework Convention on counterfeit drugs being developed by the WHO.

Tackling counterfeit drugs requires many different strategies involving the active cooperation of all stakeholders. These include governments, the pharmaceutical industry, healthcare professionals, police, customs, distributors, patients' organizations, and those concerned about people's rights. Most importantly they involve individuals making decisions not to purchase unregulated drugs of any kind, no matter how attractive they may seem. Only through individual decisions and global policies can society embark upon the elimination of this scourge.

Specific Recommendations

The rationale and justification for each of these is elaborated upon in this report. The recommendations are not listed in any particular order of priority.

- ✓ Ireland should encourage and actively engage with the development of an International Framework Convention on counterfeit drugs through the WHO.
- ✓ Laws that specifically address counterfeit drugs should be passed, putting civil and criminal sanctions in place for those who engage with counterfeit drug trade.
- ✓ All government departments with an interest in any aspect of counterfeit drug trade should cooperate in responding to this issue both locally and globally.
- ✓ Public health authorities should develop clear and efficient mechanisms that allow healthcare professionals and the public to report suspected counterfeit drugs.
- ✓ A media campaign is needed to bring accurate information on counterfeit drugs to the public's attention. Consultation with media experts is needed to ensure the most effective campaign is launched in a variety of outlets.

- ✓ Pharmaceutical companies should openly report cases of counterfeit drugs and cooperate with anti-counterfeit police and customs operations.
- ✓ Intensive international discussions are needed to find ways to reduce the cost of authentic pharmaceuticals in the developing world.
- ✓ Healthcare professionals should educate themselves on counterfeit drugs and ensure these issues are discussed in training programmes for future professionals.
- ✓ Healthcare professionals should be vigilant in checking for counterfeit drugs and alert patients to the dangers with counterfeit drugs.
- ✓ An Garda Síochána and Customs and Excise should be resourced to work with Interpol on counterfeit drug investigations.
- ✓ Research projects should investigate whether and to what extent An Post and other package carriers are being used to bring counterfeit drugs into Ireland.
- ✓ Research projects should be funded into the development of portable and inexpensive testing kits to permit rapid identification of authentic and counterfeit drugs.
- ✓ Research projects should be funded and conducted to describe the extent of the counterfeit drugs problem in Ireland.
- ✓ Research should be funded and conducted into the extent to which Irish people use the Internet to obtain all forms of medicinal products.
- ✓ Research should evaluate the quality of all types of medicinal products available in Ireland over the Internet.