

International Perspectives

Nurses join worldwide effort to protect patients from fake medicines

Fake medicines increasingly place patients and the general public at risk across the world. In response to this challenge, the International Council of Nurses (ICN) and nine other global health organisations have joined forces to make patients, communities and health practitioners aware of the dangers of counterfeit medicines.

Fight the Fakes is a global movement to spread the word about this under-reported, yet growing threat to public health. The campaign website (<http://www.fightfakes.org>) raises awareness of the dangers and impact of fake medicines. It highlights the stories of people adversely impacted by counterfeit medicines and of those working to stop this crime. The website also serves as a resource for organisations and individuals who want to support the effort by sharing resources, outlining opportunities for action and reporting what they are doing.

Fake medicines place both patients and the general public at risk. Patients believe they are receiving genuine treatment. Instead they are being given potentially dangerous products that could increase resistance to genuine treatments, and cause

further illness, disability or even death. Fake medicines pose a public health danger by contributing to development of treatment resistance.

'ICN takes fake and sub-standard medicines seriously, as do our colleagues in this campaign', said David Benton, ICN Chief Executive Officer. 'ICN has worked since 2005 to develop materials and raise awareness of the threat of fake medicines. Now we are stepping up that effort and joining the call to health care professionals, patients, pharmaceutical companies, governments and the general public to work together to draw attention to the dangers posed by fake medicines. ICN believes that combatting this serious threat to patient safety requires a system-wide effort involving all players, and a long-term view to solutions'.

Fake medicines are reported in virtually every region of the world, although people in low-and middle-income communities are often at greater risk. In high-income countries, the incidence of fake medicines is less than 1% of market value, according to the estimates of the countries concerned. Sales of fake medicines rise to 10% globally. In some areas of Asia, Africa and Latin America, fake medicines may account for up to 30% of medicines in circulation. In

Africa, one-third of all malaria medicines are probably fake. It is estimated that one half of medicines purchased on illegal Internet sites that hide their physical address are fake.

Nearly any type of pharmaceutical product can be and has been counterfeited. This includes lifesaving medicines used to treat malaria, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, cancer, heart disease, diabetes and other life-threatening conditions, as well as 'lifestyle' medicines such as those for erectile dysfunction and weight loss.

The *Fight the Fakes* partners believe that public awareness and coordinated actions among all actors involved in the manufacturing and distribution of medicines are vital. The ten global partners will contribute their experience, knowledge and insights, and work together to protect patients across all regions of the world. They will also advocate for the creation and strict application of legislative and regulatory frameworks to effectively combat this global threat.

Fight the Fakes supports the World Health Organization (WHO) Mechanism to combat Substandard/Spurious/Falsely-labelled/Falsified/Counterfeit Medical Products and calls for international, multi-stakeholder collaboration under WHO leadership.



SPEAK UP ABOUT FAKE MEDICINES