

## Position on counterfeit and substandard medicines



### Alarming patient safety issue

- The most recent data from the European Commission shows that 34 million fake medicines were found by European customs authorities in just 8 weeks during 2008.<sup>1</sup> This demonstrates the explosion in counterfeiting when compared to the 2.7 million fake medicines seized during 2006.<sup>2</sup>
- International criminal gangs are becoming increasingly involved in medicines counterfeiting. This is because the profit margins are often much higher than those for illegal drugs and the prison sentences much lower.<sup>3</sup>
- Counterfeiters are able to produce pills that look genuine, even to pharmaceutical security experts, but are made in unhygienic conditions and often contain little or no active ingredient. Cheap and sometimes toxic ingredients are used to achieve the right visual effect – for example, furniture polish to achieve a gloss finish. These pills seriously damage health by failing to provide the life-saving effect of a genuine medicine.<sup>4</sup>
- Up to 62% of prescription only medicines purchased on the internet are counterfeit or substandard.<sup>4</sup>
- Fake prescription medicines are being unknowingly dispensed by high street pharmacies to patients with life threatening, including neurological and psychological, conditions. Most recently, medicines for schizophrenia, heart attacks, prostate cancer and diabetes reached European patients though the legitimate supply chain.<sup>5,6</sup>

### European Brain Council

- The European Brain Council believes that counterfeit and substandard medicines represent a serious threat to European Public health.
- Action is needed to ensure that the legitimate supply chain is secure. Fake medicines that reach patients through their local high-street pharmacy are not only a public health threat but may undermine patient confidence in health services and pharmaceutical interventions.
  - The European Brain Council supports all additional supply chain security measures put forward by the European Commission's pharmaceutical package. It also recognises that the practice of repackaging of medicines from the original manufacturer's pack increases the chances of patients receiving counterfeit or substandard medicines.
- It is important that Europe creates a legal environment which targets counterfeiters and deters counterfeiting in the interest of public health.

## References

1. DG Taxation and Customs. Millions of illegal medicines stopped by "MEDI-FAKE" action. December 2008. Available at: <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/08/1980&format=HTML&aged=0&language=en&guiLanguage=en> (date accessed: 06/04/09)
2. European Commission, Taxation and Customs Union. 2007 Summary of community customs activities on counterfeit and piracy. Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/taxation\\_customs/resources/documents/customs/customs\\_controls/counterfeit\\_piracy/statistics/counterf\\_comm\\_2006\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/resources/documents/customs/customs_controls/counterfeit_piracy/statistics/counterf_comm_2006_en.pdf) (Date accessed: 06/04/09).
3. The Stockholm Network. Coincidence or Crisis? Prescription medicine counterfeiting 2006. Available at: <http://counterfeiting.unicri.it/docs/Coincidence%20or%20Crisis.pdf> (date accessed: 06/04/09)
4. EAASM. The Counterfeiting Superhighway. 2008. Available at: [http://v35.pixelcms.com/ams/assets/312296678531/455\\_EAASM\\_counterfeiting%20report\\_020608.pdf](http://v35.pixelcms.com/ams/assets/312296678531/455_EAASM_counterfeiting%20report_020608.pdf) (date accessed: 06/04/09)
5. MHRA. Drug Alerts issued relating to counterfeit medicines. (2008). Available at: <http://www.mhra.gov.uk/Safetyinformation/Generalsafetyinformationandadvice/Adviceandinformationforconsumers/Counterfeitmedicinesanddevices/index.htm> (date accessed: 06/04/09)
6. MHRA. Press release: Urgent warning for diabetics about counterfeit insulin pen needles. 2009. Available at: <http://www.mhra.gov.uk/NewsCentre/Pressreleases/CON041472> (date accessed: 06/04/09)