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PEOPLE IN IRELAND PUMP

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16th February 2010 - One of the largest investigations of its kind estimates the counterfeit medicines market in Ireland may be worth more than EUR86 million a year^{1,2} contributing to the European-wide black market of EUR10.5 billion².

Until now putting a value on the size of the counterfeit medicines market in Ireland has been difficult. However, the 'Cracking Counterfeit Europe' research commissioned by Pfizer reveals a massive black market economy generated by counterfeit medicines. This comes just weeks after Gunter Verheugen, Vice-President of the European Commission, announced that 34 million fake tablets had been seized on European borders in just two months.³ The number of counterfeit medicines uncovered at EU borders has increased from 560,598 articles in 2005 to 4,081,056 in 2007; a seven-fold increase over two years^{4,5}.

The new research shows how one in five (21%) of the 1,000 people in Ireland surveyed, equating to over 600,000 people in the total population, admitted to buying prescription only medicines from illicit sources^{1,2}. Worryingly, the results suggest that in the population of Ireland overall, thousands¹ are turning to the internet to buy medicines that should be prescribed by a healthcare professional - even though it has been estimated that between 50 and 90% of medicines bought from online sources are fake^{6,7}. Other sources where people are purchasing prescription medicines without prescription include overseas/on holidays (16.6%); through a friend (12%); in response to an e-mail / spam offer (6.5%); in a nightclub/pub (2%).

Commenting on the results, Irish Patients Association CEO, Stephen McMahon said: "There are many tools needed to crack counterfeit medicine, one of which is more knowledge so this research which reveals the scope of the problem in the European Union and Ireland is to be welcomed. We need to do more as the fuse on this major public health time bomb ignites - many people don't realise the very real dangers of buying medicines online and that one click of the mouse could kill."

According to the research, the main reasons people consider going online to access medicines is to save time and money, with over a quarter of people in Ireland surveyed (27%) doing so because it's quick and convenient¹ and over two thirds (70%) wanting to save money¹.

The harsh reality is counterfeit medicines can contain harmful ingredients such as rat poison, boric acid and lead paint^{8,9}. They're often produced by people with no appropriate qualifications⁶ and can include too much, too little or none of the active ingredient they should include^{10,11}. As a result, fake medicines can and do cause serious harm to patients, which can sometimes lead to death¹¹.

Dr John Farrell, Pfizer's Medical Director said: "People in Ireland are risking their health and contributing to the criminal economy by accessing medicines from outside legitimate healthcare systems. One in seven (14%) of those surveyed don't acknowledge that taking prescription only medicines without a prescription is a risky activity¹. Yet the majority (74%) of people said if they thought the medicines could be fake, this would impact the likelihood of them purchasing¹.

"This points to a clear need for greater public awareness and education. People are not only unaware of the very real dangers of counterfeit medicines, but also that they're fuelling an illegal and harmful criminal market."

Irish Press Releases

With 50% of people turning to the internet for health information and advice,¹ this problem looks likely to increase. ‘Cracking Counterfeit Europe’ was initiated to uncover the scale of the counterfeit medicines problem across Europe, and establish why the public is buying prescription only medicines from illicit sources. While the pharmaceutical industry works with health regulators, customs, law enforcement and trade organisations to uncover counterfeiters and bring them to trial, this report uncovers the sheer size of the problem and the reasons why people continue to fuel the market.

Jim Thomson, Chair of the European Alliance for Access to Safe Medicines “This research shows quite clearly that an alarming number of people are risking their health by opting out of the healthcare system. When they do that, when they buy prescription medicines off-prescription, they stand an extremely good chance of receiving a fake. My question to any patient considering such a purchase would be “Where do you turn when the adverse reaction, side effect or for that matter lack of effect kicks in?”

“The message is clear - if you want to be healthy and stay healthy, see a healthcare professional and only take prescription only medicines prescribed by a legitimate healthcare source.”

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Editor’s Notes:

Stephen McMahon, CEO, Irish Patient’s Association is a leading patient advocate against counterfeit medicines and recently co-drafted with the Department of Enterprise and Trade the initial European Security Agenda item for FP7 funding on 2010. The IPA is a core member of an Irish Lead Consortium competing for these EUR3.5 million funds.

The Final FP7 Security Agenda Item is: Topic 2010.1.3-2 Tackling counterfeit medicines and related criminal networks

Description of topic:

o Counterfeit medicines are a serious threat. The research activities will focus on identifying genuine medical products (including medicines, diagnostics and medical devices) by methods easily usable in the field as well as securing their legitimate supply chain. Important features are to identify and trace specific medical products such as research on fingerprinting of active pharmaceutical ingredients, tracing of individual tablets in a batch, innovative value added processes or technology focused solutions for individualising packs thereby ensuring product pedigree, etc. Additionally research activities may focus on how criminal organisations work. This could also include research on business networks for internet sales of counterfeit medical products.

o Expected impact: The solutions proposed should offer the prospect of a significant reduction in the amount of counterfeit medicines and/or medical devices in circulation. The proposed innovative solutions must enhance and add value to existing EC initiatives.

About Pfizer

Pfizer Inc, the world’s largest research-based pharmaceutical company, discovers, develops, manufactures and markets prescription medicines in 11 therapeutic areas including oncology, cardiovascular, pain, neuroscience and infectious diseases, including HIV/AIDS. Pfizer is also the world’s largest animal health company.

Pfizer is one of Ireland’s leading employers and the largest pharmaceutical sector investor and employer here. One of the first pharmaceutical companies to locate in Ireland, Pfizer has a rich heritage of innovation and expansion over a forty year period. The business boasts over 5,000 colleagues across 13 locations based in Cork, Dublin, Kildare, Limerick, and Sligo.

Ireland is a leading manufacturing base for Pfizer globally, exporting to global markets. Total capital investment by the

company in Ireland exceeds \$7billion.

About the research

The research was undertaken by Nunwood on behalf of Pfizer Inc and involved 14,000 men and women from 14 countries across Europe. The research was undertaken between 27th October and 8th November 2009.

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