

PRESS RELEASE



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Organisations Collaborate to Help Public to Spot the Fake

Pfizer Malaysia collaborates with Ministry of Health (MOH), Malaysian Urological Association (MUA) and Malaysian Pharmaceutical Society (MPS) in Spot the Fake Campaign to tackle counterfeit medicines

KUALA LUMPUR, XX June 2016 – In conjunction with the Men’s Health Week, Pfizer Malaysia launched a public awareness campaign- *Spot the Fake*, in alliance with the Ministry of Health Malaysia (MOH), Malaysian Urological Association (MUA) and Malaysian Pharmaceutical Society (MPS), aiming at raising awareness among the public on the dangers of counterfeit medicines.

The *Spot the Fake* campaign is a 360 campaign with both on-ground and on-line engagements to drive awareness so that the public seeks the right channels for genuine medicines. The website also aims at educating them on the dangers of counterfeit medicines and how to “Spot the Fake” by using the various strategies outlined in the site.

John McKendry, Country Manager of Pfizer Malaysia launched the campaign as stating “Our goal is to achieve conversations on the safety of patients so we can make access to medicines safer and build a community of discerning patients who equip themselves with knowledge to ask the right questions and seek the right channels,” at the event.

Counterfeit medicines continue to be a serious issue in Malaysia. According to *the Emerging Markets Health Network*, counterfeit medicines constitute approximately 5% of total medicines in Malaysia¹. It is quite a high number as compared to the more industrialized countries; the incidence of counterfeit medicines is estimated to be less than 1% of total market, whereas in emerging markets the incidence rate is estimated to range from 10 to 30%².

Among the various channels of the counterfeit medicines, online pharmacies are one of the main contributors to the problem as 95.6% of online pharmacies are operating illegally, over 90% of online pharmacies supply prescription-only medicines without prescription, and 67% of men who purchase prescription-required erectile dysfunction (ED) medicines without a prescription do so via the internet³. Prof. Dr. Zulkifli Md Zainuddin, Deputy Dean and Deputy Director of Human Resource Development and Senior Consultant Urologist of UKM explained that “Patients feel shy and uncomfortable to talk about their men’s health issues, so they choose to rely on internet sources instead of consulting with their doctors. This is one of the main reasons that there is a huge counterfeit market especially for ED treatments.” *The Malaysian Men’s Attitudes on ED Quantitative Report* published by Pfizer Malaysia in 2015 also found out that the reluctance to seek official channels is driving Malaysian Men to become victims of unscrupulous traders and websites who prey on those who are desperate to seek treatment. “In this context, doctors need to play a role to provide a comfortable avenue for the patients to open up about their problems. This way, it minimizes the chances of men going to unregulated sources to obtain medicines. 52% of Malaysian men are getting their information from healthcare websites and 41% trust word of mouth and recommendation from family and friends⁴.

Counterfeit medicines are a serious public health threat, since they can contain harmful ingredients such as talc, lactose, sucrose chalk, printer ink, commercial grade paint and even drywall. High levels of toxic solvents and impurities which are residuals of the manufacturing process are also found in those spurious drugs⁵. It is because most of the manufacturing facilities are operating under the radar of regulatory bodies. The result of using counterfeits can be serious, not only damaging victims’ health, but also at times leading to fatalities⁶.

To hamper these problems, the *Spot the Fake* campaign brings forth the tools that allow the public to educate themselves on how to ‘Spot the Fake’. As the online centre for public education and knowledge sharing, the *Spot the Fake* microsite (www.spotthefake.com.my) was launched and open for public access - a one stop portal where the public can learn various anti counterfeit strategies such as; how to identify the authenticity of medicines - security seals, colour shifting ink logo, radio frequency

¹ Retrieved from: <http://english.astroawani.com/malaysia-news/five-cent-medicines-malaysia-are-counterfeit-pfizer-48197> Accessed on 29 June 2015.

² Jackson G, Arveer S, Banks I, et al. Counterfeit phosphodiesterase type 5 inhibitors pose significant safety risks. *Int J Clin Pract.* 2010;64:497- 504. EAASM report June 2008: The Counterfeiting Superhighway. <http://www.eaasm.eu/eaasm-reports>. Accessed December 12, 2012.

³ EAASM report June 2008: The Counterfeiting Superhighway. <http://www.eaasm.eu/eaasm-reports>. 2008. Jackson G, Arveer S, Banks I, et al. Counterfeit phosphodiesterase type 5 inhibitors pose significant safety risks. *Int J Clin Pract.* 2010;64:497- 504.

⁵ American Enterprise Institute. The deadly world of fake drugs. February 2012. Available at: <http://www.aei.org/files/2012/02/27/-appendix>. Accessed November 22, 2013.

⁶ Fight the Fakes Organization, Fact Sheet retrieved from <http://fighthefakes.org/resources/sffc-factsheet/>

identification, tablet coating, chemical markets and micro-texts, encrypted serialization and electronic patient verification; how to ascertain the right channels to get original medicines.

Speaking at the Spot the Fake campaign launch today, Dr. Salmah Bt. Bahri, Director of National Pharmaceutical Regulatory Agencies, Ministry of Health explained, “Counterfeit medicines are a serious act of crime, a persistent global issue. According to the Interpol, counterfeit medicines claim about 1 million people’s lives globally every year⁷. Malaysia is not a counterfeit free zone yet as many people still fall prey to these counterfeit medicines despite the efforts with government regulations and enforcement. According to statistics, seizures made by pharmaceutical enforcement reported the existence of counterfeit medicines in this country is about 3-6%. The Pharmaceutical Association of Malaysia found that approximately 5% of prescription medicines are fake, including eye drops, inhalers and medicines for erectile dysfunction with incidence rate of 8.5%⁸. These are very alarming figures. It is important for relevant stakeholders to come together to shoulder this responsibility and address this serious issue together.”

Prof. Dr. Zulkifli Md Zainuddin emphasized “Fake medicines contain incorrect amount or no active ingredients and high levels of impurities and contaminants. The biggest problem is these unknown ingredients and impurities may lead to serious adverse events and even death. In addition, incorrect or incomplete description of what is present in tablets increases the risk of drug interactions. More often than not the patients who rely on this substandard products, remain untreated, lose the proper treatment opportunities. It is not as simple as buying a fake bag, it is about your health.” He added.

Mr. Amrahi Buang, President of Malaysian Pharmaceutical Society said that “Counterfeiters these days adopt sophisticated methods to copy original drugs, and it is getting very difficult for the public to distinguish if the medicine is original or not. With more people worldwide becoming increasingly dependent on the internet and what it could provide, many have fallen prey to illegal pharmacies that are trading in counterfeit medications online. World Health Organisation (WHO) states that over 50% of medications bought online are counterfeit. There are also a lot of channels operating out of regulation, where the public needs to be aware of this issue to avoid counterfeit medicines. As the first line healthcare provider in the community, we will work together with our partners to educate and empower the patients, so they will know the right questions to ask, right channel to go to get their medicines.”

In an effort to tackle the overall counterfeit medicines issues, the exhibition of the Ministry of Health *Kenali Ubat Anda* was also open to the public in Sime Darby Convention Centre. Besides, the campaign revealed the Spot the Fake public service announcement as an introduction to campaign, premiering the first initiative by the alliance which aims to educate the public in and get the awareness message across in a quick and simple way. The campaign is set to drive a grass root movement with a pharmacist training programme with the Malaysian Pharmacy Society as well as the Malaysian Community Pharmacists which is its sister association. Spot the Fake mini booklets with educational activities are available at local pharmacies.

⁷ Counterfeit drugs kill 1 million annually: Interpol [Online] Accessed: 19 May 2014 at <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/counterfeit-drugs-kill-1-million-annually-interpol>

⁸ <http://www.thestar.com.my/lifestyle/health/2015/01/04/the-counterfeit-menace/>

For more information, visit the website www.spotthefake.com.my.

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About Pfizer Malaysia

Pfizer Malaysia is committed towards Working Together for a Healthier World™. At Pfizer, we apply science and our global resources to improve health and well-being at every stage of life. We strive to set the standard for quality, safety and value in the discovery, development and manufacturing of medicines for people and animals. Our diversified global health care portfolio includes human and animal biologic and small molecule medicines and vaccines, and many of the world's best-known consumer products. Every day, Pfizer colleagues work across developed and emerging markets to advance wellness, prevention, treatments and cures that challenge the most feared diseases of our time. Consistent with our responsibility as the world's leading Biopharmaceutical Company, we also collaborate with health care providers, governments and local communities to support and expand access to reliable, affordable health care around the world. For more than 50 years, Pfizer has worked to make a difference for all who rely on us. To learn more about our commitments, please visit us at www.pfizer.com.my

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