



# World Health Professions Alliance WHPA

## “Be Aware, Take Action” Counterfeit Medical Products Campaign 2010

REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON COUNTERFEIT MEDICAL PRODUCTS

San José, Costa Rica, 19 October 2010  
Final Summary Report





## WORLD HEALTH PROFESSIONS ALLIANCE

### REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON COUNTERFEIT MEDICAL PRODUCTS

San José, Costa Rica, 19th October 2010

## Final Report – Summarised version

### 1. Introduction and objectives of the workshop

The regional workshop aimed to bring together representatives of national health professions organisations and relevant authorities to:

- Share information and examples of initiatives and best practices on the counterfeit medical products situation throughout the region
- Hold a discussion among health professions and relevant authorities about how to spur action to reduce the infiltration of counterfeit medical products in the region
- Discuss action plans for health professionals in each country participating in the workshop so that the momentum to combat counterfeits continues throughout the next 12 months
- Collectively commit to prioritizing the issue of counterfeit medical products through a regional “Call to Action”

**2. Participants:** National health professions’ organisations or dentists, pharmacists, physicians, physical therapist and nurses from Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua and Panama.

### 3. Introduction

Dr. Nuria Montero, President of the Colegio de Farmacéuticos de Costa Rica, and Mr. David Benton, CEO of the ICN representing the WHPA, both highlighted that counterfeit medical products (CMP) are an underdiagnosed public health problem. Health professionals are often unaware of the existence of such products and therefore are not alert to their infiltration into the legitimate distribution chain. Such products make their way silently into health professionals’ daily practice and into patients’ lives, compromising therapeutic outcomes and often causing a worsening of the existing disease and/or generating additional morbidity and even death. Another daunting side effect of counterfeit medical products is that they undermine patients’ trust in their healthcare professionals and in the healthcare system as a whole. Both speakers highlighted the importance of this workshop as the first event bringing together representatives from five different health professions from nine countries, to raise the awareness about counterfeit medical products and initiate interprofessional and international collaborations to fight this problem.

Counterfeiting of medical products is not a recent phenomenon, but it has grown exponentially in recent times, especially due to discrete and informal distribution channels such as illegal internet pharmacies. However, the problem has been tackled mostly from the perspective of regulatory bodies, customs and police controls and intellectual property issues. Again, both speakers coincided that this was not the angle from which this workshop would be looking at the problem. Our aim was to discuss it as healthcare professionals, with a clear focus on patient protection. Dr. Montero and Mr. Benton highlighted that, as healthcare professionals, we need to consider the existence of such products at all times, and be vigilant in order to detect them whenever possible, report them and help purge them from the system. We further have a role in raising the patient’s attention to this fact, alert them to purchase their medicines from reliable sources only, and educate them to identify anything suspicious about their medical products. Patients are the key element of the healthcare chain to combat counterfeit medical products, and preparing them to do so is a paramount mission for all healthcare professionals. The Minister of Health of Costa Rica did not attend the event or sent apologies.

**4. Counterfeit medical products situation in Central America and the Caribbean. Regional initiatives. Presentation by PAHO, FDA and the Pharmaceutical Forum of the Americas**

Dr. José Luis Castro, Advisor on Rational Use of Medicines to the **Pan-American Health Organization**, who made his

presentation from Washington DC via teleconference, gave some statistical data on the situation but started by warning about the inconsistency and relative unimportance of such data.

Dr. Moisés O'Neil, Deputy Director of the **FDA Office for Latin America** reiterated some of the issues touched upon by Dr. Castro, especially with regards to the "invisibility" of counterfeit medicines and the difficulty in identifying them even with advanced technology. He presented a number of examples in which counterfeits were visually identical to the original products, with only minor and subtle differences. Because of this, health professionals and patients are the only stakeholders that can close the circle of control by reporting suspicious product through the appropriate channels.

Mr. Gustavo Sáenz, Technical Secretary of the **Pharmaceutical Forum of the Americas** then presented an overview of the legal framework existing in each country for defining and pursuing counterfeit medical products. From his analysis, he concluded that the absence of clear and strong regulations concerned with counterfeit medicines in each country, or the lack of enforcement thereof, pave the road for counterfeiters. A lot of work is still needed in all countries to develop better legislation, establish effective controls and apply harder sanctions to violators.

## **5. Break out Group Discussion by topics**

There were eight discussion groups on the following topics:

1. Responsibility of health professionals
2. Collaborative practice
3. Capacity to intervene of health professionals
4. Raising public awareness about counterfeit medical products
5. Collaboration with relevant authorities
6. National systems for combating counterfeit medical products
7. Regional cooperation initiatives
8. Controlling informal distribution channels

For a detailed description of the proposals of each group, please consult the full report. As an overall conclusion, groups recognised that healthcare professionals must take an active role in combating counterfeit medicines, by educating patients about the real risks involved in purchasing products from unreliable sources, helping them identify any suspicious signs of counterfeit medicines, both through visual inspection and by detecting any unexpected clinical signs. They also identified the need for educational activities addressed to healthcare professionals in order to raise awareness about this problem and promote capacity building. Other important conclusions of the groups included the need for an adequate legal framework that clearly defines counterfeit medicines and typifies counterfeiting as a criminal act against public health and patient safety, and establishes heavy penal measures against people involved in such acts.

## **6. Presentations by the Costa Rican Committee on Counterfeit Medicines**

This committee is formed by representatives of the MoH, the Costa Rican Social Security System, National Customs, the Ombudsman (Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration), the Pharmaceutical Society, the Medical Society, National and Transnational pharmaceutical industry and the FDA.

The presentation by Dr. Isabel Céspedes (MoH) indicated that the initiatives of the committee included drafting and lobbying for the approval of a law project on counterfeit medicines and other regulations, designing protocols for procedures related to fighting and reporting counterfeit medicines, develop inter-institutional cooperation strategies, educate and raise the awareness of social agents about the risks of buying medicines online or by mail order or at outlets not authorised by the MoH; propose and enforce sanctions to counterfeiters, and lobby authorities for their continued commitment.

Dr. Enrique Donato, who represents the pharmaceutical industry in the Committee, focused on questions such as: where, how and by whom are such medicines made? Are they stolen from the industry and sold in the black market? Are there pharmacies and internet sites that could be selling these products? Can such products be identified by visual inspection? Do we have such a problem in Costa Rica? He showed videos and images of manufacturing sites and police operations unveiling such criminal acts, which were quite shocking in terms of the lack of elementary hygienic measures and complete absence of basic ethics in such practices. He also demonstrated how deceiving such products could be. Dr. Donato highlighted the importance of this committee in bringing together the various stakeholders and pushing forward the combat against counterfeit medicines.

The debate that followed concluded that it is very important to establish such committees in each country. Some countries still do not have any legislation with regards to counterfeit medical products, and Costa Rica may stand as a reference in the region.

## **7. Break out Group Discussion by countries**

Participants split up by country to discuss strategies for interprofessional collaboration at national level, to address the counterfeit medical products problem or threat, and establish long-term aims for continuous cooperation. The detailed results of the discussions can be consulted in the full report.

## **8. Approval of Call to Action**

The attached version of the “WHPA San José Call To Action On Counterfeit Medical Products” was approved unanimously.

## **9. Conclusions and final remarks**

The following conclusions were read to all participants, who agreed upon them as a summary of the results of the workshop and their main concerns and priorities:

1. Counterfeit medical products are, above all, a public health issue and a threat to patient safety with grave consequences in terms of increased disease burden, mortality and costs for healthcare systems.
2. Patients are simultaneously the most powerful link in the chain, as they have the power to decide which medical products they acquire and take, and the most vulnerable link in that same chain, as they are the direct victims of counterfeit medical products.
3. We are all patients.
4. It is paramount to inform, alert and raise the awareness of patients about the risks of CMP.
5. Patients/users should know the risks of acquiring their medical products from non-registered or illegal sources that are not supervised by a healthcare professional.
6. Healthcare professionals from all 5 disciplines gathered in San José recognised that the problem with CMP is also their problem, and they accept that they must take on the responsibility of working together to combat this problem.
7. They have also identified the need for capacity building in this regard, and to establish collaboration with all stakeholders related to medical products, including patients, politicians, healthcare authorities, police bodies, customs, regulatory bodies, the industry and all healthcare professionals' organisations.
8. Participants also identified the need for educational campaigns addressed to patients using all possible channels, such as posters, TV, radio, SMS to mobile phones, social networks on the internet and, above all, the direct interaction between healthcare professionals and patients.
9. Participants recognised the need for strong and clear laws and institutions that prevent, pursue and punish such crimes – laws that are written in collaboration with healthcare professionals' organisations and are based on their technical input.

## **10. Next steps**

WHPA and the HCPs who participated in this workshop are keen to ensure that the energy and momentum that has been generated is not lost. To this end all HCPs who participated in the workshop are encouraged to:

1. Disseminate the San Jose Call to Action and workshop materials to your own members.
2. Share with your MoH and the media about the San Jose Call to Action and WHPA toolkit.
3. See if there is a national committee or association of multi-disciplinary professional associations? If yes, is combating counterfeit medical products on their agenda? Could they organise a national workshop with HCP and other stakeholders? If no, could a meeting be organised to talk about setting such a group in the country?
4. All participants are requested to please complete the evaluation form and to return it to [gspinto@fip.org](mailto:gspinto@fip.org) and [foro@colfar.com](mailto:foro@colfar.com) by 10 February 2011.

## **THE WHPA SAN JOSÉ “CALL TO ACTION” ON COUNTERFEIT MEDICAL PRODUCTS**

### **World Health Professions Alliance Workshop on Combating Falsified and Counterfeit Medical Products**

**19th October 2010, San José, COSTA RICA**

We, health professionals' organisations from Central America and the Spanish-Speaking Caribbean countries, as well as Colombia and Mexico, have gathered in this first-ever, multi-disciplinary health professionals event addressing falsified and counterfeit medical products, to recognize that such medical products present a serious public health problem worldwide, and to issue this Call to Action to patients, the general public, health care professionals, and government officials.

We recognize that increased vigilance by health care professionals and patients can help make safer use of medical products.

We are concerned that falsification and counterfeiting of medical products, including the entire range of activities from manufacturing to knowingly providing them to patients, is a vile and serious criminal offense that puts human lives at risk and undermines the credibility of health systems.

Likewise, we are concerned about the infiltration of such products in the legitimate distribution chain, leading to the unknowingly prescription, dispensing and administration of such medicines to patients by healthcare professionals.

Accordingly, we issue this Call to Action to initiate concerted action in our countries:

#### **PATIENTS AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC:**

We call on patients and the general public in our countries to:

- Only buy medicines from legal outlets, such as registered pharmacies and appropriately trained personnel such as registered pharmacists
- Never buy medicines from illegal or uncontrolled Internet sites that hide their physical location and are not supervised by properly trained health professionals.
- Report a suspected falsified or counterfeit medical product to their attending health professional.

#### **HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS:**

We call on health care professionals in our countries to:

- Work together across various disciplines to raise awareness of and action against falsified and counterfeit medical products amongst patients, the general public, their colleagues and health authorities;
- Consider and report falsified and counterfeit medical products as a reason when patients do not respond or have an unexpected response to treatment;
- Always procure medical products from a legitimate distributor or wholesaler.

#### **NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS OF HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS**

We call on national organisations of health professionals to:

- Work together with the other organisations of healthcare professionals in each country in order to optimise resources, maximise the effectiveness of our efforts and pass on to the public an image of cohesiveness of healthcare professions around the challenge of counterfeit medical products.
- Work closely with the Pan American Network for Drug Regulatory Harmonization (PANDRH) / Working Group for Prevention and Combat Drug Counterfeiting, of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).
- Encourage their members to take an active role in identifying, reporting and eliminating falsified or counterfeit medical products from the distribution chain.

**GOVERNMENT HEALTH OFFICIALS:**

We call on government health officials in our countries to:

- Adopt the WHO definition of falsified and counterfeit medical products so that access to legitimate, safe, effective and affordable generic medicines will not be hindered by inappropriate intellectual property rights enforcement
- Conduct regular public campaigns educating patients and the public about how they can protect themselves from the dangers of falsified and counterfeit medical products
- Establish national reporting systems that enable health professionals to report and to get feedback about adverse events, drug-related problems, medication errors, misuse or drug abuse, defects in product quality or detection of falsified and counterfeit medical products.

The Participants of this WHPA workshop agree unanimously on the SAN JOSÉ “CALL TO ACTION” and commit to plan and act in cooperation in support of it.

## Annex 3 WHPA Media Release on HCP workshop



### MEDIA RELEASE

#### **Call to Action: Fight the dangers of medical counterfeits**

*JOINT INITIATIVE BY THE HEALTH PROFESSIONS FROM CENTRAL AMERICA, THE CARIBBEAN, COLOMBIA AND MEXICO*

*San José, Costa Rica / Geneva, Switzerland, 26 October 2010*

Representatives of the health professions (dentistry, medicine, nursing, pharmacy, and physical therapy) and patient organizations from nine countries have joined together in a 'Call to Action', to combat the threat to public health and patient safety posed by counterfeit and falsified medical products.

Twenty-three national health professional organisations who are members of the World Health Professions Alliance (WHPA) partners – International Council of Nurses (ICN), the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP), the World Confederation for Physical Therapy (WCPT), the World Dental Federation (FDI) and the World Medical Association (WMA) – agreed upon and signed the **WHPA San José Call to Action on Counterfeit Medical Products** when they met at the first-ever multi-professional workshop on counterfeit medical products on 19 October, in Costa Rica's capital city of San José.

The workshop concluded that counterfeit medical products are, above all, a public health problem and a threat to patient safety with grave consequences in terms of increased disease burden, mortality and costs for healthcare systems. Furthermore, it was recognised that patients have the power to decide where to buy and how to use medical products, but they are also the most fragile link in the chain and the main victim of counterfeit medical products. It is therefore crucial to inform and raise the awareness of patients about the risks of counterfeit medical products and encourage them to take action to fight this problem.

Under the banner of the "Be Aware, Take Action" campaign against counterfeit medical products, this was the first of a series of WHPA workshops, aiming to tackle the serious challenge of counterfeit medical products worldwide. Co-hosted with WHPA by the Pharmaceutical Society of Costa Rica and the Pharmaceutical Forum of the Americas, the workshop brought together participants from Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua and Panama.

David Benton, Chief Executive Officer, International Council of Nurses, speaking on behalf of the World Health Professions Alliance, stressed the importance of vigilance when it comes to falsified and counterfeit medical products. "As concerned physicians, nurses, pharmacists, dentists, physical therapists and patient representatives, we are speaking out – because we are very worried about the dangers that counterfeit and falsified medical products pose to patient safety. Now is the time to act."

Workshop participants agreed upon and signed the **WHPA San José Call to Action on Counterfeit Medical Products**, addressed to patients, healthcare professionals and their organisations and health authorities and urging these stakeholders to *Be Aware and Take Action*, as the WHPA campaign proposes.

The workshop targeted joint strategies amongst the five health professions to identify report and purge counterfeit medical products from the supply chain, and to empower patients to make the best decisions when it comes to acquiring, carefully checking and using medical products.

Presenters included the Pan-American Health Organization, the US Food and Drug Administration Office for Latin America and the FIP Pharmaceutical Forum of the Americas. These provided a clear picture of the severity and complexity of the problem, as well as the efforts being made by these organisations to fight it and the legal framework available in each country to define, combat and penalise the production and distribution of counterfeit medical products.

There was consensus on the need to raise awareness about this issue amongst healthcare professionals and the public in general, through massive campaigns and training initiatives. Likewise, participants unanimously agreed on the need for strong and clear laws and institutions that prevent, pursue and punish such crimes – laws that are written in collaboration with healthcare professionals’ organisations and are based on their technical input.

**About WHPA** [www.whpa.org](http://www.whpa.org)

The World Health Professionals Alliance WHPA is a unique alliance of The International Council of Nurses (ICN) [www.icn.ch](http://www.icn.ch), the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) [www.fip.org](http://www.fip.org), the World Confederation for Physical Therapy (WCPT) [www.wcpt.org](http://www.wcpt.org), the FDI World Dental Federation (FDI) [www.fdiworldental.org](http://www.fdiworldental.org) and the World Medical Association (WMA) [www.wma.net](http://www.wma.net). WHPA addresses global health issues striving to help deliver cost effective, quality health care worldwide. Together, the partners of the WHPA include more than 600 national member organizations, making WHPA the key point of global access to health care professionals within the five disciplines.

**The International Council of Nurses (ICN)** is a federation of national nurses associations, representing the more than 13 million nurses working worldwide. [www.icn.ch](http://www.icn.ch)

**The International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP)** is the global federation of national organisations of pharmacists and pharmaceutical scientists representing more than two million pharmacists around the world. [www.fip.org](http://www.fip.org)

**The World Confederation for Physical Therapy (WCPT)**, the global voice for physical therapists / physiotherapists, has 101 national member organisations representing over 350,000 members of the profession. [www.wcpt.org](http://www.wcpt.org)

**The FDI World Dental Federation (FDI)** is a federation of approximately 200 national dental associations and specialist groups representing more than one million dentists worldwide. [www.fdiworldental.org](http://www.fdiworldental.org)

**The World Medical Association (WMA)** is the global federation of national medical associations from around the world, directly and indirectly representing the views of more than nine million physicians. [www.wma.net](http://www.wma.net)

For more information about Be Aware, Take Action, please see [www.whpa.org/counterfeit\\_campaign.htm](http://www.whpa.org/counterfeit_campaign.htm) or send an email to [whpa.campaign@wma.net](mailto:whpa.campaign@wma.net)



Publicado en *RFI* (<http://www.espanol.rfi.fr>)

## La lucha contra los medicamentos falsos

Creado 2010-10-18 23:15

Por Mónica Acero

Costa Rica

Delegados de Salud de países latinoamericanos buscan en Costa Rica estrategias para combatir contra la venta ilegal de medicamentos y productos falsificados, que amenazan contra la vida de las personas y ponen en entredicho los sistemas sanitarios.

Esta es la primera cita regional de este tipo que reunirá en San José a profesionales de toda Centroamérica, Colombia, México, Cuba y República Dominicana. Los representantes de los diferentes países cerrarán el encuentro con la firma del acuerdo "llamado a la Acción de San José", para dirigirlo a gobiernos, médicos, pacientes y población en general, sobre la inconveniencia de adquirir y consumir productos médicos falsificados.

Hace unas semanas en San José, Paul Seigman, representante estadounidense de la Federación de Drogas y Alimentos advirtió que 50% de los fármacos que se venden por Internet son falsos y pueden traer graves consecuencias e incluso la muerte, o no tener ningún beneficio.



Medicamentos de origen fraudulento en un mercado en Costa de Marfil.  
(Photo : AFP)

**URL del envío:** <http://www.espanol.rfi.fr/americas/20101019-la-lucha-contra-los-medicamentos-falsos>



## IAPO Members participate in the World Health Professional Alliance's (WHPA) regional workshops on counterfeit medicines

by [IAPO](#) at 3:16PM Tuesday 07 December 2010 ([News](#))



IAPO Members from African and Latin American countries were invited to attend two World Health Professional Alliance's (WHPA) regional workshops earlier this year. The meetings held on 19 October 2010 in San José, Costa Rica and 23 November 2010 in Abuja, Nigeria focused on the dangers of medical counterfeits. The participants IAPO enabled to attend travelled from El Salvador, Guatemala, Liberia, Mexico, Nigeria and Uganda and worked with representatives of the health professions such as dentistry, medicine, nursing, pharmacy, and physical therapy.

Both workshops were held under the banner of the "**Be Aware, Take Action**" campaign against counterfeit medical products and one of the results of these meetings was the united 'Call to Action: Fight the dangers of counterfeit medicines.'

You can find the press releases and the full call to action in English, French and Spanish at the bottom of the page.

### IAPO facilitated attendance – Costa Rica

Gladis Margarita Gutiérrez de Fuentes, Salvadoran Association for Cancer Prevention, El Salvador  
Alma Areentina Robles Avila, Heroes of Hope Association, Guatemala  
Azucena Galindo de Calderon, PROCRECE; Pro Kids Growth Association, Guatemala  
Prof. Luis Adrián Quiroz Castillo, Institute of People Living with HIV/AIDS, Mexico

### IAPO facilitated attendance - Nigeria

Fred C. Johnson and David Das Cheneken, Liberian United Youth for Community Safety and Development LUYCD  
Victoria Balogun, Women and Children Alive, Nigeria  
Risikat Motunrayo Onawola, Association of Women Living With HIV/AIDS in Nigeria (ASWHAN)  
Obatunde Oladapo, Positive Life Association of Nigeria (PLAN)  
Regina Namata Kamoga, Community Health and Information Network (CHAIN), Uganda - [Read Regina's report from the meeting](#)

### [WHPA counterfeit medical products campaign](#)

These workshops were held as part of WHPA's counterfeit medical products campaign. Like many healthcare stakeholders, WHPA is extremely concerned about the infiltration and sale of counterfeit medical products of the legitimate supply chain in causing life threatening, adverse effects in patients. With WHPA "Be Aware, Take Action" they provide dentists, nurses, pharmacists, physicians and physical therapists with tools and strategies to advocate for appropriate investments in the education and capacity building of health professionals to detect counterfeits and to safely inform colleagues and patients.

[WHPA](#) is a unique alliance of the [International Council of Nurses \(ICN\)](#), [the International Pharmaceutical Federation \(FIP\)](#), [the World Confederation for Physical Therapy \(WCPT\)](#), [the World Dental Federation \(FDI\)](#) and [the World Medical Association \(WMA\)](#). WHPA addresses global health issues striving to help deliver cost effective, quality health care worldwide. Together, the partners of the WHPA include more than 600 national member organizations, making WHPA the key point of global access to health care professionals within the five disciplines. IAPO work closely with the WHPA to address our common goals and to ensure that patients are involved at all levels in the decision making processes.

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### Attachments...



[San José Call to Action Fight the dangers of medical counterfeit.pdf](#)



[San José Llamado a la Acción Lucha contra los peligros de los productos médicos falsificados.pdf](#)

[Abuja Call to Action Fight the dangers of counterfeit medicines.pdf](#)



[Abuja Appel à l'Action d'Abuja Lutter contre les dangers des médicaments contrefaits.pdf](#)



[Final WHPA Abuja Call to Action 24 11 2010.pdf](#)



[WHPA ABUJA appel à l'action FINALE.pdf](#)



[Meeting report - Regina Namata Kamoga.pdf](#)

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**International Alliance of Patients' Organizations**

703 The Chandlery 50 Westminster Bridge Road London SE1 7QY United Kingdom

Tel **+44 20 7721 7508** Fax +44 20 7721 7596

info@patientsorganizations.org www.patientsorganizations.org

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News

CALL TO ACTION! FIP and WHPA hold workshop on combating counterfeit medicines in Costa Rica... [View more »](#)

## Programmes and Projects

### Pharmacy Practice and Science



PSWC 2010  
**PSWC2010**  
New Orleans  
14-18 Nov 2010

FIP aaps

#### Pharmaceutical Sciences World Congress

The next PSWC will be held in 2010 in New Orleans, USA. [Click here](#) to download the Programme at a Glance!

[Click at the congress above](#) to visit the site to watch the PSWC 2010 Webisode 7 promotional video.

#### Upcoming Events

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## CALL TO ACTION!

On 19 October 2010 FIP along with its partners in the World Health Professions Alliance (WHPA) held a workshop in San Jose, Costa Rica calling for a "Call to Action" on counterfeit medical products. Below is the resulting Call to Action as put forth to all health professionals:

We, health professionals' organisations from Central America and the Spanish-Speaking Caribbean countries, as well as Colombia and Mexico, have gathered in this first-ever, multi-disciplinary health professionals event addressing falsified and counterfeit medical products, to recognize that such medical products present a serious public health problem worldwide, and to issue this Call to Action to patients, the general public, health care professionals, and government officials.

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We call on government health officials in our countries to:

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- Conduct regular public campaigns educating patients and the public about how they can protect themselves from the dangers of falsified and counterfeit medical products

## Medicinas que matan

RNW Salud,OMS

viernes, 29 de octubre de 2010



*La Organización Mundial de la Salud advierte que, a escala mundial, un 10% de los medicamentos es adulterado. Debido al deficiente control de seguridad, en algunos países de Latinoamérica, la cifra puede ascender al 30%.*

Actualmente, en San José, Costa Rica, se discute por primera vez la venta ilegal de medicamentos y productos falsificados. Pastillas idénticas a las originales pero adulteradas con tiza, polen o harina; jarabes que no contienen ningún principio activo o que, aún peor, pueden incluir sustancias que causan la muerte. Gran parte de estos medicamentos piratas viene de China, país donde se puede obtener excelentes copias de casi todo, desde bolsos a abrigos. Y las medicinas no son una excepción.

### **Vacíos legales**

Las imitaciones de medicamentos son muy refinadas, calcadas al milímetro, y las mafias consiguen colocarlas tanto en el mercado interno como en el extranjero, sobre todo en países en desarrollo de Latinoamérica o África, donde se benefician de los vacíos legales y porque los productos auténticos son inasequibles para gran parte de la población. Los países más afectados de Latinoamérica son Bolivia, Perú, Brasil, Paraguay y Colombia, aseguran expertos del sector, que explican que es difícil seguir la pista a estas medicinas porque pueden cambiar de manos unas 30 veces antes de llegar al consumidor final.

Dentro de China, los escándalos también se multiplican. El pasado enero, dos personas perdieron la vida en Xinjiang, en el noroeste del país, tras ingerir medicamentos falsos contra la diabetes. Seis meses más tarde, Baidu, la mayor motor de búsqueda en Internet, fue acusado de redirigir a los usuarios a páginas que vendían remedios falsos para la piel y para estimular la potencia sexual. Unas 3.000 personas resultaron afectadas.

Pero Internet no es el único canal de venta de estos productos, pues éstos son obtenibles en hospitales, farmacias e incluso en la calle. Existen tanto vendedores de segunda mano como compradores que se arriesgan a adquirir un producto falso porque no pueden pagar el original. Si bien no se cuenta con cifras oficiales ni exactas, según publican algunos medios chinos, en este país asiático mueren varios miles de personas al año por ingerir medicina adulterada.

### **Leche adulterada**

Uno de los casos más sonados fue el de la leche con melamina, que las autoridades no quisieron hacer público hasta después de los Juegos Olímpicos del 2008. Al menos 6 bebés murieron tras beber esa

leche contaminada, y otros 300.000 pequeños sufrirán daños de por vida. Este mes se supo que a unas 1.700 personas se les administró vacunas antirrábicas falsas en el sur del país. El drama es que algunas víctimas, además de no recibir compensación, suelen ser perseguidas para que sus casos no perjudiquen al Gobierno. " "A mi hija la llevamos a vacunarse de sarampión en el 2008, cuando tenía 8 meses. Tres días después le entró mucha fiebre y a los cuatro días empezaron las convulsiones. La vacuna era falsa y le provocó epilepsia," explica Chen, nombre ficticio que usamos para proteger su identidad, comerciante en la provincia minera de Shaanxi.

## **Medicamentos caducados**

En el 2006, las autoridades sanitarias de Shaanxi, al suroeste de Pekín, llegaron a un acuerdo con una empresa privada. Según la investigación realizada por un diario chino, la compañía consiguió, por casi medio millón de euros, el monopolio de venta y distribución de vacunas. El empresario obtuvo un beneficio de unos 12 millones de euros en 2 años, aunque las vacunas llevaban meses almacenadas al calor y ya habían caducado cuando se administraron. Como consecuencia, varios niños murieron y centenares sufren epilepsia, como la hija de Chen, y otros daños incurables. Las autoridades no han condenado al culpable.

"Hace dos meses, acudimos al Ministerio de Sanidad en Pekín, pero nos detuvieron, y la policía local nos acusó de perturbar el orden público. Un abogado nos ayudó para protestar por vía legal, pero nadie quiere admitir nuestras quejas. El Ministerio nos prometió una solución, una compensación, pero no se nos ha reconocido nada todavía," se queja amargamente.

## **Evitar escándalo**

Los señores Zhang y Ma están en la misma situación, prácticamente arruinados por pagar los gastos médicos de sus hijos, y vigilados las 24 horas del día por las autoridades para que no generen ningún escándalo informativo. "En el departamento local de salud me dijeron que las convulsiones no tenían nada que ver con la vacuna, pero yo investigué por mi cuenta y me enteré de que la vacuna estaba caducada," asegura Zhang, quien aún no ha cumplido los 30. "Mi hijo sigue en el hospital y su tratamiento me cuesta cada mes 1.200 euros. Ya nos hemos gastado más de 25.000 euros en su salud," añade.

A su lado, el señor Ma, asiente y explica su caso. "El colegio no nos llamó antes de ponerle la vacuna a mi hija, no pidieron autorización a los padres. Y luego nos enteramos de que la clínica con la que trabajaban era ilegal. No cumplieron el reglamento y el personal no estaba cualificado para vacunar, pero así ganaban dinero. A mi hija le inocularon una encefalomiелitis, una inflamación del sistema nervioso central".

Ma ha acudido varias veces a Pekín para protestar ante el Ministerio de Sanidad. Nunca ha conseguido una explicación ni una compensación. "Hasta ahora no he pasado miedo, pero cada vez me siento más en peligro porque ya me han detenido dos veces y me han amenazado con que a la tercera me enviarán a un campo de reeducación por el trabajo. Cuando nos pillan nos mandan de nuevo al pueblo, no quieren que estemos en Pekín. Pero entienda que si nos hubieran dado una respuesta convincente no tendríamos que seguir viniendo a la capital, a cientos de kilómetros. Tenemos familia, un trabajo...No venimos hasta aquí por gusto".

En Latinoamérica las posibilidades de comprar un medicamento falso son aproximadamente del 30 por ciento. En China a eso se le suma el temor de ser una víctima perseguida por las autoridades.



ALIANZA SE CREÓ EN COSTA RICA

## Nueve países se unen contra falsificación de medicamentos

Autoridades de Salud, especialistas y pacientes buscan ley para castigar práctica

Fármacos falsos pueden producir daños en órganos e inclusive la muerte

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Especialistas en Salud de Costa Rica, Panamá, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, México, Colombia, República Dominicana y Cuba se reunieron ayer en el país para constituir una alianza en la lucha contra la venta de medicamentos falsificados.



La OMS estima que el 10% de los fármacos que se venden son falsos. En Internet esta cifra sube al 50%. Archivo

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una de las razones para que esto ocurra es que muchos pacientes no saben reconocer un medicamento que no es genuino.

De hecho, la Comisión de Productos Falsificados del Ministerio de Salud únicamente ha recibido este año cuatro denuncias de medicamentos falsos.

La falsificación de insumos médicos no solo ocurre por la compra directa.

“Ya hemos logrado detectar medicamentos falsificados que pretendían distribuirse en las farmacias de la Caja Costarricense de Seguro Social. El Laboratorio de Normas y Calidad del Medicamento de la Caja logró detectarlos a tiempo y no afectaron a los pacientes. Actualmente, se investigan varios casos”, dijo Nuria Montero, presidenta del Colegio de Farmacéuticos de Costa Rica.

**Plan de acción.** Para delimitar esta situación, los expertos elaboraron el *Plan de Acción de San José*.

“El documento llama a estar alerta, a saber que los medicamentos falsificados son una realidad y un problema, y que es necesario actuar para crear una regulación común”, puntualizó Gustavo Sáenz, secretario técnico del Foro Farmacéutico de las Américas.

En Costa Rica, uno de los mayores retos para frenar la diseminación de fármacos adulterados es que no hay una ley que castigue a quienes distribuyen esos productos. Por ahora, el Ministerio solo puede ampararse en la Ley General de Salud y clausurar el negocio que expende esos fármacos.

Ya se presentó un proyecto de ley en la Asamblea Legislativa para tipificar esta falsificación como delito y penarlo con cárcel.

Además de los esfuerzos regionales por tener una legislación común en el Istmo, los pacientes afirman que la primera responsabilidad recae en ellos mismos.

“Los medicamentos falsos están a la orden del día, pero es responsabilidad nuestra saber distinguirlos y denunciarlos”, comentó Luis Adrián Quirós, representante de la Organización Internacional de Pacientes.

### Fármacos falsos

Para distinguir un fármaco falso:

**Diferencias.** Examine si hay diferencias en el empaque, forma, tamaño o color del producto.

**Eficacia.** Si el fármaco no le sirve para tratar su mal cuando antes sí lo hacía, es posible que sea falso. Acuda a su médico.

**Efectos secundarios.** Si no experimenta los efectos secundarios usuales o si estos son diferentes o más fuertes, es posible que el producto sea falso.

**Precio.** Si el costo del medicamento es mucho menor, desconfíe. Los fármacos falsos pueden valer hasta la mitad del original.

**Seguridad.** Compre sus tratamientos solo en farmacias autorizadas por el Ministerio de Salud. Evite comprar por Internet: el 50% de los productos médicos que se venden en la red es falso.

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