

# BE AWARE

There are several points of contact where the subject of counterfeit medicines can be discussed, for example at consultation, during diagnostic tests, when the treatment is being prescribed, at the medicine purchase point, when monitoring treatment.

**A patient may feel vulnerable because of being unwell; discussion might be experienced as threatening or invasive. It is important to query gently, by asking about:**

**1. WHERE** patients will or did buy the medicine. Emphasis can be placed on the importance of buying medicine from a known and reliable source.

*For example: "Did you purchase the medicine from a known and reliable source?"*

**2. WHAT** patients should look out for when they buy medicines. It can be suggested that patients check the packaging, the product and the patient leaflet when they purchase medicine.

*For example: "Was the packaging of the product intact, clearly labeled with dosing, manufacturer, batch number, and expiry date?"*

**3. HOW** the medicine is expected to take effect. By explaining what should happen when patients take medicine, health professionals can help patients identify anything unusual.

*For example: "Did the medicine cause any unexpected side effects?"*

**4. WHEN** the first improvements in condition should be experienced. If a medicine is supposed to start relieving symptoms within 24 hours for example, then patients should know, so that if the medicine does not take effect, they can notify their health professional.

*For example: "Has the medicine taken longer than anticipated to have an effect?"*



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**When treatments fail...**  
Counterfeit medicines are possible suspects

## The World Health Professions Alliance (WHPA)

The World Health Professions Alliance brings together the International Council of Nurses, the International Pharmaceutical Federation, the World Dental Federation and the World Medical Association and speaks on behalf of more than 25 million health care professionals worldwide. Dentists, nurses, pharmacists and physicians are key players in the health team - delivering health care to individuals, families and communities regardless of their colour, creed, gender, religion or political affiliation. The WHPA aims to facilitate collaboration between the health professions and major international stakeholders such as governments, policy makers, and the World Health Organization. By working in collaboration, instead of along parallel tracks, the patient and health care system benefit.

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**Help keep  
patients safe**

# BE AWARE

**If you are prescribing, administering or delivering medicines, please be aware that if treatments fail this may be because of counterfeit medicines.**

## **What is the extent of the problem?**

The incidence of counterfeit medicines is increasing worldwide. Counterfeit medicines are manufactured below established standards of safety, quality and efficacy. They are deliberately and fraudulently mislabeled with respect to identity and/or source.

Counterfeiting can apply to both brand name and generic products and counterfeit medicines may include products with the correct ingredients but fake packaging, with the wrong ingredients, without active ingredients or with insufficient active ingredients.

The response to this threat is still insufficient. This is why you, as a health professional, can use your knowledge and skills to help keep patients safe.



## Help keep patients safe

**There are a few key steps that you can use to identify and report counterfeit medicines.**

### **BE AWARE**

**B**e observant. Become familiar with the WHPA visual inspection tool so you can identify counterfeit medicines. If anything about medicines is unusual or different, consider counterfeit medicines. If the patient has bought the medicine from an unauthorized, unknown or unreliable source, discuss medicine safety as a possible matter for concern.

**E**valuate your patient's response to the medicine use. If treatment fails, or has an unexpected effect, consider counterfeit medicine as a possible suspect.

**A**cquire as much information as possible about the product, its packaging, pharmaceutical properties and usage.

**W**here was the product procured? Find out whether it was purchased from a known and reliable source.

**A**ctively inform your health professional colleagues if medicines have been confirmed as counterfeit, as well as other patients who might also have received the medicines.

**R**emove any suspect medicines from the pharmacy, clinic, hospital or consulting room. Report the suspected counterfeit to the relevant health authorities.

**E**ducate your colleagues, patients and the public to identify and avoid counterfeit medicines by purchasing their medicines from known and reliable sources.

Counterfeit medicines such as diluted or insufficiently-dosed antimicrobials, are a threat to public health as they contribute to drug resistance in populations, leading to increased infection rates, increased need for research and development of new drugs, and increased health care spending.

Counterfeit medicines are a threat to individual health. They can cause serious harm. This harm can be generated either by excessive activity of the principal active ingredient, by an insufficient dosage of active ingredient or by the toxicity of ingredients that should not be present in the medicine. Patients may also think they are protected against a disease or an undesired health event when in fact they are not.

Counterfeiters seek huge profits and make innocent people unwell. They often choose medicines that are either highly priced (profit on price) or widely distributed (profit on volume).

Because legislation is weak in many countries, as indeed is enforcement, penalties are frequently low and counterfeiters are not deterred.

Increased vigilance by health professionals and patients can help make public and individual health safer. Working together, health professionals and patients can identify and report counterfeit medicines to improve patient safety.

### **If the presence of counterfeit medicines is suspected or has been confirmed, health professionals should:**

- Ask patients to bring in their medicine. Compare the medicine with other samples and use the WHPA visual inspection tool to assess the suspected counterfeit medicine.
- Act quickly to change the medicine to protect the patient. Reassure the patient on the way forward and reassess therapy accordingly, to ensure the patient is not left without treatment.
- Report the suspected counterfeit to the appropriate authorities. Spread the word that the criminals are being sought: this sometimes dissuades further action.
- Warn colleagues and management that counterfeit medicines have been identified in the workplace.