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Counterfeit Drugs Put Lives at Risk

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(BUSINESS WIRE)--Pfizer welcomes the 1st European Parliamentary symposium on pharmaceuticals “Putting an end to drug counter-feiting”, which convened European policy makers, regulators and specialists on counterfeiting and medicines trading in the European Parliament today.

“Pfizer is very concerned about the surges in counterfeit medicines, putting at risk the lives and wellbeing of patients in Europe and elsewhere,” said Julian Mount, Vice President, of European Trade at Pfizer. “Illegal internet trade is one part of the story. However, fake drugs have also made it into the legitimate medicines supply chain in Europe.”

Pfizer’s particular concern in Europe is the entry of counterfeit medicines into the legitimate supply chain via medicines trading commonly referred to as the parallel trade of medicines between member states. For this to happen, the complex and fragmented nature of medicine distribution in Europe presents multiple opportunities. Over 140 million medicine packs are parallel traded across Europe each year, all are opened and altered and can travel through as many as 20-30 pairs of hands before finally reaching the patient.**1**

For instance, when counterfeit Lipitor was discovered in the UK supply chain in July 2006 – resulting in a UK-wide recall which involved over 240 pharmacies; over 50% of returned packs were found to be fake. Middlemen companies who trade as intermediaries in buying and selling life saving medicines were directly involved in this case and were found with counterfeits in their possession.

The WHO estimates that 8% to 10% of the global medicine supply chain is counterfeit, reaching as high as 25% in some countries.**2**

At a WHO meeting in Rome in February 2006, Dr. Nils Behrndt, Deputy Head of Pharmaceuticals Unit DG Enterprise and Industry, highlighted a 1000 per cent increase in counterfeit seizures between 1998 and 2004 in Europe.

“It is particularly difficult for patients to know if a medicine is counterfeit when it is supplied through trusted sources”, said Mount. Whether a counterfeit drug comes through an illegal channel or has managed to penetrate the legitimate medicines supply chain – Pfizer strongly believes that patients must be protected against fake medicines that, in the best case, have no effect, or worse can cause serious harm. Pfizer believes this arbitrage system in life saving medicines must stop and prescription medication must be safeguarded from these proven dangers. It is time, with the growth in counterfeits entering the European supply chain, for a substantial review of the way medicines are traded, re-packaged and supplied by numerous intermediaries in Europe.

[1] Haigh, J., IMS Global Consulting, quoted in ‘Parallel Trade in Medicines’, Social Market Foundation, June 2004

[2] http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs275/en/

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