Case Study: Counterfeit Contents

"How counterfeit drugs are a public health problem is clear... With little or no active ingredient a person does not receive all the therapeutic, diagnostic or prophylactic benefit and will either not recover or will have a delayed recovery... If made with a toxic substance, a counterfeit drug has the capacity to poison or kill a human."

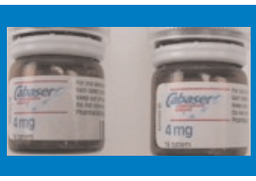
WHO, 2006

A wide range of medicines, including Pfizer medicines, have been counterfeited to date. Fakes of cholesterol lowering drugs; prescription pain-relievers; medication to manage high blood pressure and a vital Parkinson's treatment have all been targeted.

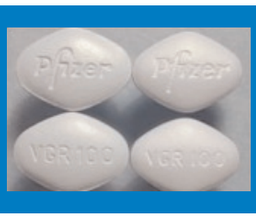
A wide range of substitutions are used in these fakes, some such as talcum powder are used by counterfeiters to economise their use of an active pharmaceutical ingredient; in other cases one active pharmaceutical ingredient is substituted with a completely different one, rendering the tablet useless. In all cases however there is a danger to patients. They may receive insufficient amounts of their essential medication, or as in the case of counterfeit Viagra® tablets found in South Korea far too much. Some contain no active ingredient at all.

The on-going challenge for patients, healthcare professionals as well as those hunting the counterfeiters, is the skill of those passing off fake drugs as genuine medicines. The colour of a tablet, its embossed stamp as well as packaging, labelling and even information leaflet are all carefully imitated.

Some examples from Pfizer's on-going vigilance in tracking down the angerous fakes are outlined here:



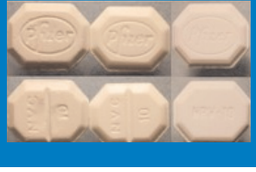
Counterfeit packaging and mimic tablets found in Turkey. The tablets contained no API; giving no vital symptom control for patients with Parkinson's Disease.



Counterfeit Viagra® found in Hungary. Instead of the appropriate API, these counterfeits contained only amphetamine – commonly known as "speed".

Countefeit Viagra® found in South Korea. These tablets contained three times the appropriate dose of API, giving no additional benefit but placing patients at greater risk of side effects.

Counterfeit Ponstan® found in Colombia. As well as containing a potentially toxic substance: boric acid, these tablets were dyed yellow using road paint and finished with a coating of floor wax.



Counterfeit Norvasc® found in Canada. Tablets contained no API at all, only talc. Resulting in undertreatment of high blood pressure and angina.

API – active pharmaceutical ingredient.
Note: Counterfeit medicines positioned on left.

Pfizer

European Trade Group