



Communication with patients

Many counterfeit medical products are first detected by patients. Health professionals should share any concerns about counterfeit medical products with their patients in a safe and non-threatening manner, being careful not to unnecessarily undermine adherence to treatment.

A patient information leaflet can be available in waiting rooms, on counters, and in common areas. A poster can be placed on the walls of medical and nursing practices, pharmacies, clinics, hospitals and community centres. Patients may then ask about the subject or wish to discuss it spontaneously.

There are several points of contact where the subject of counterfeit medical products can be discussed, for example at consultation, during diagnostic tests, when the treatment is being prescribed, at the medical product purchase point, and 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

- 1. Where** patients bought or will buy the medical product. Emphasis can be placed on the importance of buying medical product from a pharmacy or other known and reliable sources. For example: *"Did you purchase the medical product from a known and reliable source?"*
- 2. What** patients should look out for when they buy medical products. It can be suggested that patients check the packaging, the product and the patient leaflet when they purchase medical product. For example: *"Was the packaging of the product intact, properly sealed, clearly labelled with dosing, manufacturer, batch number, and expiry date?"*
- 3. How** the medical product is expected to take effect. By explaining what should happen when patients take medical products, health professionals can help patients identify anything unusual. For example: *"Did the medical product cause any unexpected side effects?"*
- 4. When.** If a medical product is supposed to start relieving symptoms within 24 hours for example, then patients should know, so that if the medical product does not take effect, they can notify their health professional. For example: *"Has the medical product taken longer than anticipated to have an effect?"*

In daily practice

When prescribing, dispensing or administering medical products, health professionals should explain to patients in what way the medical product should improve their health and what benefits and/or side effects patients may experience. It can be suggested that medical products should only be obtained from known and reliable sources.

Health professionals can encourage patients to

- Buy their medical products from known and reliable sources.
- Purchase their medical products from properly trained personnel, such as properly qualified pharmacists.
- Tell their health professional about any problem, lack of reaction, overreaction or adverse event after using the medical product.
- Discuss the possibility that a medical product may be counterfeit where there is no response or an unexpected response to the medical product.
- Remain vigilant about the possibility of counterfeit and substandard medical products if they buy from the internet.

If counterfeit medical products are suspected, health professionals should

- Ask patients to bring in their medical product. Compare the medical product with other samples.
- Act quickly to change the medical product if it is substandard or counterfeit, so the patient is not left without treatment.
- Report the suspected counterfeit to the appropriate authorities. Report first to your manager if you work in a health facility. Depending on the national procedures you may also want to report to the ministry of health, your national health professional association, police, and customs authorities.
- Reassure the patient on the way forward and reassess therapy accordingly.

Taking precautionary measures

It is important that once a counterfeit medical product has been identified, precautions are taken to prevent others from being exposed.

- Warn colleagues and management that counterfeit medical products have been identified in the workplace.
- Suggest that health professionals be vigilant in case more counterfeits are circulating.
- Warn the relevant drug regulatory authorities that counterfeit medical products have been found.
- Spread the word that the criminals are being sought: this sometimes dissuades further action.
- Verify whether any patients have not responded to or had an unexpected response to medical products.
- Reassess possibilities that other counterfeit medical products may be present.
- Follow up with patients if counterfeiting has been confirmed, to discuss next steps in treatment.
- Address any questions and concerns patients may have through information and discussion.

What can health professionals do?

There are some key steps that health professionals can take to identify and report counterfeit medical products, to help fight such criminal practices and make treatments safer.

BE AWARE¹

Be observant. If anything about a medical product is unusual or different, consider counterfeit medical products.

Evaluate. If treatment fails, or has an unexpected effect, consider counterfeit medical products as possible suspects.

Acquire as much information as possible about the product, its packaging, pharmaceutical properties and usage.

Where. Find out whether product was purchased from a known and reliable source.

Actively inform your health professional colleagues and other patients if medical products have been confirmed as counterfeit.

Remove any suspect medical products. Report the suspected counterfeit to the relevant health authorities.

Educate your colleagues, patients and the public to identify and avoid counterfeit medical products by purchasing their medical products from known and reliable sources.

1. This acronym has been developed by the WHPA for the purpose of this toolkit.

Some useful resources:

Rapid Alert System for combating counterfeit medicine www.wpro.who.int/media_centre/fact_sheets/fs_20050503.htm

WHPA Be Aware, Take Action Toolkit www.whpa.org/counterfeit_campaign.htm

WHO Anti Counterfeit Medicines Programme www.who.int/medicines/services/counterfeit/en/index.html



www.whpa.org/counterfeit_campaign.htm