

Keep supply chain intact

Nearly a year ago *The Journal* carried a leading article pointing out the potential dangers to the public of buying counterfeit medicines, particularly over the internet (4 October 2003, p436). We wrote: "Although they are not a significant problem in the United Kingdom at present, they may become so in future." More worrying, counterfeit versions of Cialis and Reductil have now been found in the legitimate supply chain (*PJ*, 28 August, p277 and, this issue, pp335 and 341).

It could be argued that the fact that so few counterfeit products have emerged in this way is a credit to the checks and procedures in the UK system that ensure health care professionals and patients can be confident that medicines obtained legitimately are what they say they are.

However, how long will this last? The chilling description of what is going on in the US (Broad spectrum, p344), where the majority of prescription medicines are obtained by the internet and/or mail order, is a timely reminder. Cracks can appear in any system when business imperatives seem to be given greater priority than quality issues. This is not to suggest that the UK system is likely to become more like the US model. But, with all the changes expected in the next few years to the delivery of medicines and the system of reimbursement for dispensing, unscrupulous operators will exploit any weaknesses they find.

There are some suggestions that pharmacy businesses will become divided into dispensing factories and service providers. Those dispensing factories will look at any way to improve their profitability and might offer an opportunity for counterfeiters to join in. Internet pharmacies — whose development the Government is encouraging — must be maintained under the most strict controls, so that there is no possibility that patients could inadvertently use a cowboy outfit by mistake when their medicines are dispensed in a virtual pharmacy. These scenarios may not be likely but they are examples of the way the legitimate supply chain may become more fractured. The Government needs to be sure that, as the NHS changes, patients can be assured that if they do take risks with medicines it is a risk of their own making.

Chinese medicine is a risky business

Every day thousands of people buy a traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) thinking it will do them good. However, as the latest warning from the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency points out (pp335 and 342) it may just as easily do harm. Pharmacists and patients need to be vigilant that products that they stock and sell are genuine TCMs and herbal medicines and not contaminated or inactive. Unfortunately, legislation, which will come into force in a year's time, will not have any real teeth on the quality front until 2011, so patients need to be aware that the risks they are taking with TCMs and herbal preparations are of their own making.

Editor and editorial director
Olivia Timbs

Deputy editor
Andrew Haynes, *MRPharmS*
(The Society section)

Managing editor
Graeme Smith, *MRPharmS*
(Letters, Broad spectrum,
Original papers, Articles)

Assistant editor
Michael Thompson, *MRPharmS*
(Editor — *PJ Online*)

News editor
Harriet Adcock, *MRPharmS*

Senior news and features writer
Clare Bellingham, *MRPharmS*

Staff editors
Dawn Connelly, *MRPharmS*
(Contributions, Reviews)
Hannah Pike, *MRPharmS*
(Notice-board)
Lin-Nam Wang, *MRPharmS*
(CPD)

Production editor
Christopher Icha

Website controller
Gowan Clews

Personal assistant to the editor
Emma Kerby-Evans

Administrative assistant
Pauline Heslop
(Copyright and permissions)

Editorial advisory board
Angela Alexander, *FRPharmS*
Judy Cantrill, *FRPharmS*
Noel Dixon, *MRPharmS*
John Hall, *FRPharmS*
Christina Lowe, *MRPharmS*
Steve Wicks, *MRPharmS*

Head of business development
Philippa Stahelin

Office administrator — sales
Jo Cook

Classified and systems support — sales
Clare Knights

Display sales
Stuart Thomas

Classified advertisements manager
Zia Namoooya

Classified sales
Hiren Ladwa
Dorinda Lewis

Head of publishing services
John Wilson

Production manager
Joanne Marks

Production assistants
Yasmin Asghar
Adam Jones

Director of publications
Charles Fry