

Fighting Fake Medicines Sold Online Requires Commitment to Cautioning Patients

Falsified and substandard medicine harms patients, potentially causing disease progression, adverse events, and even death. When patients buy medicine from an illegal online pharmacy, these negative outcomes are definite possibilities.

In today's post-pandemic era, when consumers shop online for everything including medicine, it is critical for patients to understand the risks associated with illegal online pharmacies. Buying prescription medicine online or through social media may seem cheap and easy, but it can put patients at risk. For this reason, the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy® (NABP®) and the undersigned organizations are calling on health care providers to educate their patients about buying medicine safely.

According to the [Alliance for Safe Online Pharmacies](#), 38% of Americans know of an event where someone – either themselves or another – got substandard or falsified prescription medication from an online pharmacy. Such medication may fail to treat the patient's medical condition or contain dangerous fillers, such as drywall and rat poison. Buyers may fall victim to fraud and identity theft or expose their computer to malware. Patients also risk getting deadly pills laced with fentanyl. These dangerous medications are often sold through social media platforms targeting adolescents and young adults. Fentanyl-laced pills have been found in every state and are linked to numerous deaths throughout the United States.

Although government agencies and private actors have worked hard to curb the illegal sale of prescription drugs online, the problem persists. For the past 10 years, industry experts have consistently estimated that, at any given time, there are between 30,000 and 40,000 active illegal online pharmacies. Most illegal online pharmacies belong to organized and international criminal networks. Some networks operate thousands of related websites, which is an extremely effective way to reach a large number of consumers.

Considering the vast availability of substandard and falsified prescription medicine online, patients and their caregivers need to be educated about these illegal operations. A commitment to caution can save lives.

NABP and the undersigned organizations urge pharmacists, doctors, nurses, and other health care providers to educate their patients on the risks of obtaining substandard and falsified medicine from social media platforms and illegal online pharmacies and advise them to verify the legitimacy of a website before they buy medications from it.

1. Alert patients and caregivers to the risks of purchasing medications through social media and unverified sites by sharing stories from affected individuals.
2. Provide safe online purchasing resources, such as NABP's [Safe Site Search Tool](#) and Food and Drug Administration's [BeSafeRx](#) web page.
3. Educate law enforcement and domain registries/registrars about these online criminals so that they can take action when needed.

Participating Organizations

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 **APhA**
American Pharmacists Association