

Responding to the illegal
procurement of pharmaceuticals
online

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The Third International Conference on
Law Enforcement & public Health

Amsterdam October 2016

Health warning: 100,000 a year dying from taking dodgy medicines bought online

Headache pills made of rat poison and Viagra made of chalk: We reveal the chilling truth about internet drugs

And if you are foolish enough to buy online, the same organisation estimates your chances of being sold fake medication at higher than 50-50.

Last year, enforcement authorities from 42 countries seized more than 11.1million counterfeit tablets, capsules and vials - a 28.9 per cent increase over 2007.

In 2005, there were just 500,000 seizures for the whole of Europe.

The dangers of buying drugs online were highlighted last week during an inquest into the death of 22-year-old Amy Pain, daughter of the Venerable Richard Pain, Archdeacon of Monmouth.



Amy died following an apparent accidental overdose of online pharmaceuticals she had been buying for insomnia, anxiety and stomach aches

The Archdeacon found Amy dead in bed last October following an apparent accidental overdose of online pharmaceuticals she had been buying for anxiety, stomach aches and insomnia.

During the inquest, the Gwent coroner David Bowen expressed concern over the way in which prescription-only drugs could be bought over the internet without a prescription and said he would be contacting the relevant authorities to highlight the dangers.

Medical student died after taking banned weight loss drug bought online

Woman dies after taking 'diet pills' bought over internet

Eloise Aimee Parry, 21, from Shrewsbury, 'burned up from the inside' after taking 'diet pills' bought over internet. The tablets believed to contain highly toxic chemical dinitrophenol



The Issue

- The Internet hosts a range of virtual marketplaces for selling and buying pharmaceuticals – many operate illegally
- Substantial risk for human security and public health:
 - Bypass risk management systems
 - Access to unregulated and unauthorised sites on a global scale
- Traditional global drug control is in crisis
- UN General Assembly Special Session on drugs (April 2016): efficiency of prohibition increasingly challenged – calls for the exploration of alternative options for the prevention and control of substance misuse



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Vulnerabilities

- Illicit online pharmacies present a threat to global public health and to global cybersecurity (Mackey & Liang, 2011)
- Different actors – a *contentious grouping* difficult to regulate or control online pharmaceuticals at the domestic level
- Criminal actors (illegal manufacturers, organized crime, illicit online pharmacies), non-criminal actors (consumers, ISPs, search engines, social media platforms, payment processors)

Criminal Opportunities Online

- Specificities of the Internet – global reach, accessibility, associated possibilities of anonymity or concealment, promotion and influence
- Nature of the Internet means that these crimes are difficult to detect or prosecute
- Traditional drug trafficking utilizing networked technologies?
- Cyber-hotspots – online pharmacies, dark web marketplaces and forums
- ... what about social media, different types of virtual communities?

From 'street markets' & 'free markets' to the 'Ecommerce market'

- 'Street market' – hierarchical crime organizations
- 'Free market' – peer to peer selling
- Roles of the vendor and consumer shifting online (Lavorgna, 2015)
- Making sharing medicines a commodity
 - Larger quantities in pharmaceutical packages
 - Large orders divided into smaller shipments
- Ecommerce market – all types of substances easily available to buy online (influences - price, customer service, trust)

Current Responses

- National government reliance on existing medicine regulation
- Legal constraints - where regulatory responses have been enacted – ineffective due to dynamic nature online
- Enforcement – shutting down of illicit sites (operation Pangea)
- Intervention - Education about the risks - WHO, MHRA, FDA
- National or state validation procedures – legitimacy of online pharmacies (e.g. RPS, EU logo, VIPPS)
- Recognized lack of technical capacity
- Insufficient international enforcement cooperation

Leading the future response

- Address the gaps in policing cyberspace
- More focus on the consumer – recognise the twin needs of patients and consumers, remove the demand, further information required about safe online medicine purchasing
- Attention on virtual communities as cyber-hotspots for the procurement of illegal pharmaceuticals – understand the organizational patterns and modus operandi
- International cooperation taking a harm-reduction approach
- Promote engagement with academia, law enforcement, policy makers, the public - early intervention (informed pro-activity)

Questions?

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