

# Beware fake meds

Pharmaceutical company highlights dangers of counterfeit drugs

PFIZER Malaysia has launched a public awareness campaign called "Spot the Fake" to highlight the dangers of counterfeit medicines.

The Spot the Fake campaign is organised together with the Health Ministry, Malaysian Urological Association (MUA) and the Malaysian Pharmaceutical Society (MPS) to encourage the public to go to the right channels for medicines.

It includes a website that helps educate people on the dangers of counterfeit medicines and how to "Spot the Fake" by using various strategies.

"Our goal is to make access to medicines safer and build a community of discerning patients who equip themselves with the knowledge to ask the right questions and seek the right channels," said Pfizer Malaysia country manager John McKendry at the launch.

Counterfeit medicines are said to be a serious issue in Malaysia.

According to the Emerging Markets Health Network, counterfeit medicines constitute approximately 5% of total medicines in this country, compared with more industrialised countries where it is estimated to be less than 1%.

Incidences of fakes in emerging markets range from 10% to 30%.

Online pharmacies are one of the main contributors to the problem as 95.6% of them are operating illegally, over 90% of online pharmacies supply prescription-only medicines without prescription, and 67% of men who purchase prescription-required erectile dysfunction (ED) medicines without a prescription do so via the Internet.

According to Prof Dr Zulkifli Md Zainuddin, who is deputy dean and deputy director of Human Resource



(From left) Prof Zulkifli, McKendry, Dr Salmah and MPS president Amrahi Buang.

Development and senior consultant urologist at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), male patients feel uncomfortable talking about their health issues.

"So they rely on Internet sources instead of consulting their doctors.

"This is one of the main reasons there is a huge counterfeit market, especially for ED treatments," he said.

The Malaysian Men's Attitudes on ED Quantitative Report published by Pfizer Malaysia in 2015 also found that the reluctance to seek official channels is driving men to become victims of unscrupulous traders and websites.

Counterfeit medicines are a serious public health threat because they may contain harmful ingredients such as talc, lactose, sucrose chalk, printer ink, commercial grade paint and even drywall.

The Spot the Fake campaign aims to provide the public with the tools to identify counterfeits through [www.spotthefake.com.my](http://www.spotthefake.com.my) which is a one-stop portal where the public can

learn various anti-counterfeit strategies like how to identify the authenticity of medicines, including security seals, colour shifting ink logo, radio frequency identification, tablet coating, chemical markets and micro-texts, encrypted serialisation and electronic patient verification.

It also advises the right channels to get original medicines.

National Pharmaceutical Regulatory Agencies director Dr Salmah Bahri said counterfeit medicines claimed about one million lives globally every year.

"The Pharmaceutical Association of Malaysia found that approximately 5% of prescription medicines are fake, including eye drops, inhalers and medicines for erectile dysfunction," she said.

The campaign wants to start a grass roots movement with a pharmacist training programme handled by MPS as well as its sister association, the Malaysian Community Pharmacist Guild (MCPG).

Spot the Fake mini booklets are available at local pharmacies.