

# Counterfeit Drugs: A Threat to Patient's Health



**Dr. Inaya A. Hajj Hussein**  
Assistant Professor - Oakland  
University William Beaumont  
School of Medicine  
USA Research Associate  
Medical School AUB



**Sana Chams**  
Medical Student at AUB

## What are Counterfeit Drugs?

The simplest definition could be fake drugs since there is no globally accepted definition. However, a clear definition can be the one presented by the World Health Organization which states the following, "A counterfeit medicine is one which is deliberately and fraudulently mislabeled with respect to identity and/or source. Counterfeiting can apply to both branded and generic products and counterfeit products may include products with the correct ingredients or with the wrong ingredients, without active ingredients, with insufficient active ingredients or with fake packaging." (WHO)

## What are the Health Risks of Counterfeit Drugs?

The health risks vary with the ingredients used. It can vary from being inactive and useless if they did not contain the active ingredient(s) to being dangerous and deadly in some cases if they contained wrong or insufficient active ingredient(s). In any case, the patient's health and even his life are at risk.

## How can One Identify a Counterfeit Drug?

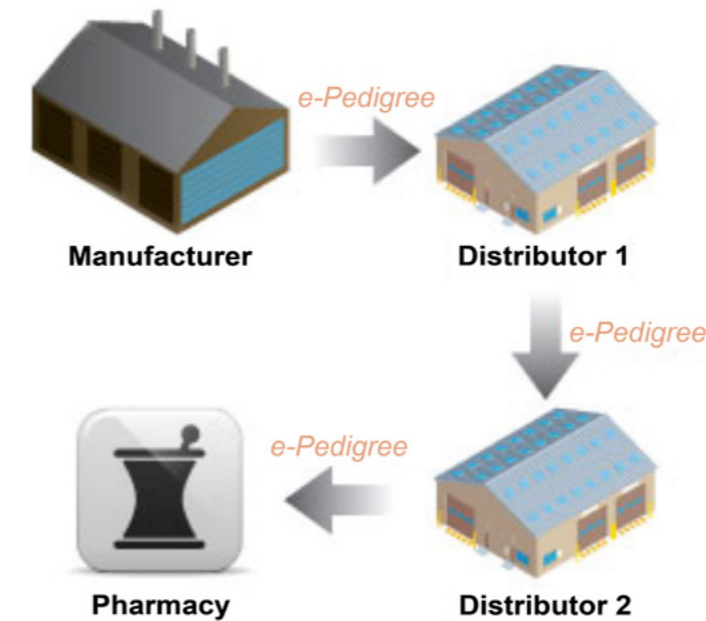
In most cases, it is impossible to identify a drug as being counterfeit and the only solution is by carrying a laboratory test. Nonetheless, the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy (NABP) states that there are several signs that should raise one's attention in addition to unanticipated side effects and those are:

- Packaging
- Labeling
- Pill Appearance
- Pill Taste

## Where are Counterfeit Drugs most Prevalent?

The Interpol stated that according to WHO, "that up to 1 per cent of medicines available in the developed world

are likely to be counterfeit. This figure rises to 10 per cent globally, but in some areas of Asia, Africa and Latin America counterfeit goods can form up to 30 per cent of the market" (Interpol). Additionally, "30% to 40% of all drugs on the Lebanese market are either counterfeit or were withdrawn from the world market but still available in Lebanon." as declared by Ismail Sukarieh a former Lebanese MP and the head of the National Association for Social Health (Ghosn, 2010).



## Are Cheaper Drugs Counterfeit?

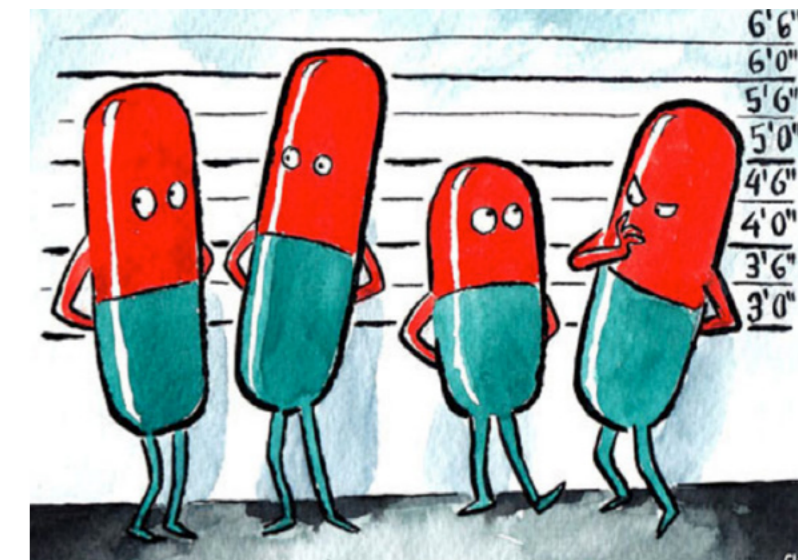
Not necessarily. Some generic drugs which are not counterfeit are sold at lower prices than the standardized drugs. However, most counterfeit drugs are cheaper than the much expensive standardized drugs since based on the National Crime Prevention Council, "drug counterfeiting generally thrives in situations where access may be limited and the prices are high" (NCPC).

## What can be Done/ is being Done to Fight Counterfeit Drugs?

The first and foremost step is to spread awareness among consumers regarding counterfeit drugs. This can be done by setting awareness campaigns, physicians/pharmacists informing their patients, and the Ministry of Health playing an active role in enlightening the public about counterfeit drugs.

Since 2008, the Interpol launched four operations: Pangea, Mamba, Storm and Cobra as a means to fight pharmaceutical crime namely counterfeit drugs through the following goals: "combating the sale of illegal medicines online, disrupt the activities of transnational organized criminals involved in the trafficking of counterfeit medical products in Eastern Africa, raise awareness, resources, educational efforts and capacity building on the issue, target counterfeit medicines in Southeast Asia, and identify, investigate and disrupt networks involved in pharmaceutical crime such as counterfeiting, illicit production and unauthorized sales of medicines" (Interpol).

Furthermore, an effective surveillance system, the Electronic Pedigree, was put into action in California where each medication has its own Electronic Product code and with the help of a Radio Frequency Identification, the medication can be traced down the supply chain, from the manufacturer to the pharmacist (Wunder&Roach, 2008). In addition, the FDA established a Counterfeit Alert Network comprised of a partnership of health profession and consumer groups as a means to broadcast alert messages about counterfeit drugs incidents across the U.S. and educate consumers and health professionals on how to identify and report counterfeit drugs (FDA).



In 2010, the Lebanese government announced "Shutting down nine pharmacies and four drug warehouses for two weeks" as stated by former Minister of Public Health, Mohammed Jawad Khalifeh (Ghosn, 2010). Moreover, last month the Ministry of Health launched the first Mobile Application to assist consumers in reporting suspicious cases of counterfeit (MOPH).



### What to do if You Encountered a Counterfeit Drug?

Inform the pharmacist and most preferably directly contact the Department of Inspection by

- Phone: 01-615-749 or
- E-mail: [inspection@moph.gov.lb](mailto:inspection@moph.gov.lb)

For further information, download Ministry of Public Health application on Android or Apple product or visit [www.moph.gov.lb](http://www.moph.gov.lb)

#### References

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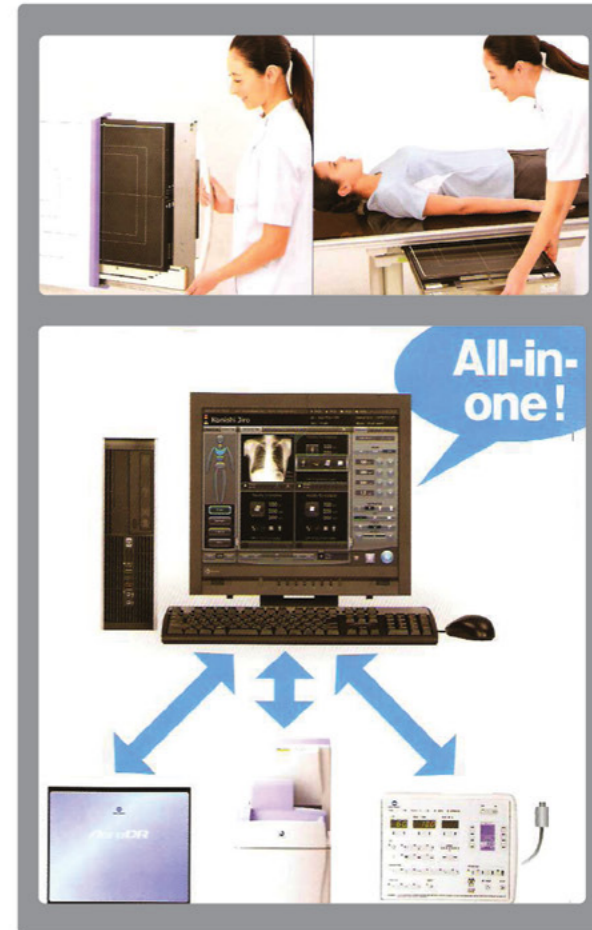


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