

July 2012

Newsletter



The Internet Exposed!

At the time of the last newsletter going to press, our two major projects to evaluate online pharmacy (legitimate and illegitimate) were well under way. This newsletter tells their respective stories in brief and we urge you to visit www.eaasm.eu, to read both of the reports and see for yourself the reality of patient safety online.

Building on our ground-breaking (and award-winning) 2008 report “The Counterfeit Superhighway” these investigative projects affirm our commitment to making the internet a safer environment for patients seeking to obtain their medicines in that way - a commitment that is underlined further by our involvement in ASOP EU.

The two projects, “Counterfeiting the Counterfeiter” (CtC) and Discounted or Dangerous” (DoD), shocked even those of us who thought that we understood the scale of the problem.

The EAASM Board commends these ground-breaking reports to you and assures you of its ongoing commitment to promoting patient safety online.

CtC Germany

This project was a major leap of faith for the EAASM. Together with our project partners, we really thought that we could achieve something remarkable, but we had no idea quite how remarkable the results would actually be. Statistics rarely tell the whole story (which is on the website) but in this case we believe that they are well worth mentioning.



In its short nine week active promotion phase, www.medizin-direkt.com attracted in excess of 350,000 hits, over 182,500 of which were unique visitors. This made it the third most popular “online pharmacy” in Germany, with an average market penetration of over 85%.

Conservative estimates suggest that had we actually been an illegitimate site, we could have generated profits of up to €35 million in the first year. For the first time, we are beginning to quantify the value of counterfeits online and this work will continue. On a more positive note, we were able to direct over 12,000 people back to the listings of legitimate online and high-street German pharmacies.



Discounted or Dangerous? (DoD)

DoD complements the CtC German website, taking a snapshot of the current patient safety standards of online pharmacy in Germany, the UK, France, Spain and Italy. Though the CtC results were shocking, they could hardly have prepared us for DoD's findings. Patients in these major European countries are being done many dis-services. There is no other way to put it.

In Germany and the UK, where online pharmacy is legal, we had expected to find high standards. In reality, over 30% of German websites surveyed didn't require a prescription (a legal requirement) whilst, in the UK, over 75% didn't display a named pharmacist on their website (also a legal requirement).

In France, Spain and Italy - where online pharmacy is illegal - we uncovered 177 websites openly selling prescription-only medicines.

DoD - the Facts

The internet is, of course, not subject to borders and ruling online pharmacy illegal in a country serves only to drive it beyond national boundaries. Incidentally, this can also be the case in countries where it IS legal.

We found some "UK" sites to actually be located in the USA, Canada, the Seychelles, whilst "Italian", "French" and "Spanish" websites were in fact in Andorra, England, India, Germany, Canada, Cyprus, US, Czech Republic, Latvia, the Bahamas and Mauritius. Of course, this effectively removes them from any aspect of member State regulation.

What became increasingly obvious during the research, is that making online pharmacy illegal does not stop patients being put at risk.

What it most certainly does do, is create an unregulated black market in prescription medicines. Dealing with that is Europe's challenge going forward. For the full report, a summary of the project and the EAASM's policy on online pharmacies, see our website, www.eaasm.eu

Campaigning for Patients

It's great to report that in the UK, the General Medical Council (GMC) appears to have backed down from proposals that would have seriously compromised the ability of patients to be fully involved in decisions concerning their treatment. Initial proposals would have seen doctors being able to prescribe or use unlicensed or off-label medicines without the patient's consent or in some cases even knowledge.



Patient groups vigorously opposed these plans and the EAASM campaigned to see them changed. After consultation, the GMC reconsidered its plan to remove the key passage from its Guidelines.

We also campaigned to have an Amendment introduced to the review of the EU Pharmacovigilance Directive, that would have seen far greater clarity, patient involvement and protection. Unfortunately this was not successful but we are undeterred and now trying to have a "Group Amendment" put down by one of the major political groups in the EU.

In the meantime, we heard that both the Netherlands and Austria were considering weakening controls over the use of unlicensed medicines, and we have written to decision-makers in both countries, urging them to reconsider.

The coming months will see us undertake a survey to establish exactly how and why those involved in hospital procurement decide to purchase unlicensed medicinal products, and what Governance processes they have in place to ensure patient safety.

A Coalition of the Willing

The EAASM is acting as Secretariat for a new initiative to combat falsified medicines on the internet. Modelled on a similar US coalition, the "Alliance for Safe Online Pharmacy" (ASOP EU), brings together a number of stakeholders, including supply chain, patient groups and internet intermediaries, working together to make the internet a safe place for patients seeking legitimate pharmacies.

The first public outing for the new coalition, will be a major summit, to be held in the European Parliament in the Autumn. Full details in the next newsletter.

In the meantime, the active participants in ASOP EU have organised themselves into three workstream groups - Policy/Legislative, Intermediaries and Buyers/Social Media. Each group is developing its workplans, with the intention of promoting real change in an online environment where, all too often, patients are unwittingly exposed to criminals peddling falsified medicines.

It is critically important to involve the so-called "intermediaries" in this important initiative and, on 9 July, a delegation from ASOP EU met with the Alliance for Responsible Trade (ART), in Brussels. This Alliance has been formed by some of the large companies involved in online trade, in order to devise voluntary and collaborative measures to combat counterfeit goods being marketed online. Medicine is only one area they are concerned about, so the meeting provided an excellent opportunity to state the patient safety case. We are extremely hopeful that ART will join our coalition and that, together, we will be able to introduce effective strategies to combat falsified medicines online.

ASOP EU is currently developing its communications strategy, including its logo and a new website, specially designed for the purpose of communicating directly with all stakeholders and, of course, providing reliable information to patients. Full details will be in the next newsletter but any reader interested in joining this important initiative can do so now, by contacting Mike (email address at the end of this newsletter.)

Your contacts at the EAASM:

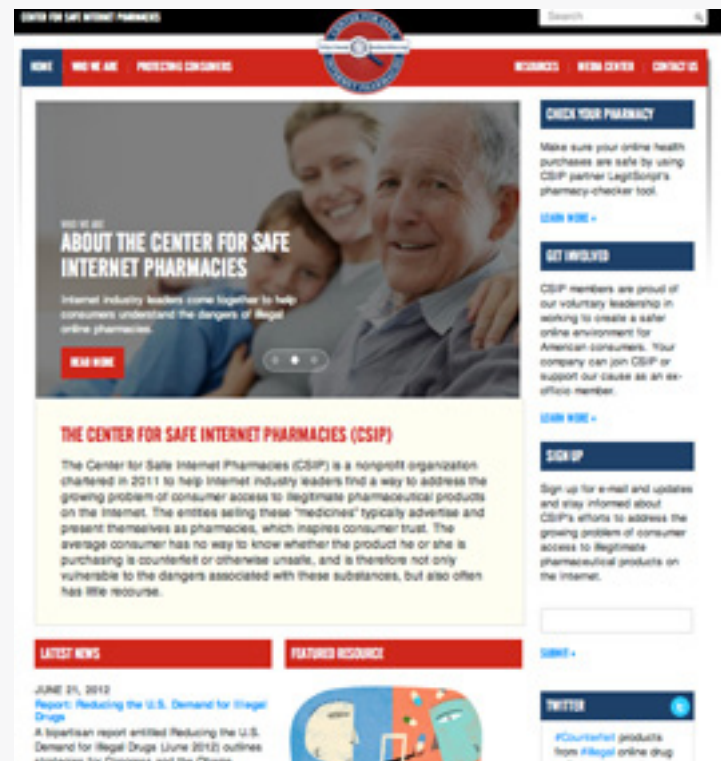
Jim Thomson, Chair - jim.thomson@eaasm.eu (+44) 7901 800608

Mike Isles, Executive Director - mike.isles@eaasm.eu (+44) 7540 462867

CSIP takes flight!

As we go to press, the US-based Center for Safe Internet Pharmacies (CSIP) is preparing for its official launch. Scheduled for July 23 and taking place at the White House, this marks an unprecedented achievement on the part of CSIP's members, and of course for the Intellectual Property Enforcement Co-ordinator, Victoria Espinel.

Although yet to launch officially, CSIP has set off in style with its new website already live (See below, or at www.safemedsonline.org).



New Members

We are delighted to welcome two new members to the EAASM. The European Sexual Health Alliance and sanofi, will add even greater strength to our efforts in promoting patient safety. Together with the European Parkinsons Disease Society, both have also joined the EAASM Board.



If you are receiving this newsletter but are not yet a member of the EAASM, then why not join? Membership details are available from Mike (mike.isles@eaasm.eu).

Jim & Mike