

Spring 2009

# Newsletter

## Jim Thomson, EAASM Chair – in the media

The European Alliance for Access to Safe Medicines (EAASM) has been continuing its tireless work to raise awareness of the counterfeit medicines threat over recent months. Recent highlights include Jim Thomson, EAASM Chair, being interviewed twice on GMTV – a breakfast news programme that is watched by approximately 13 million viewers a week – and being featured on Radio 4's Today programme.

GMTV's counterfeit news item featured throughout the morning and cited statistics from the *Counterfeit Superhighway Report*. In the interview Jim guides the presenter through the counterfeiting process from manufacturing to distribution, both through the internet and the legitimate supply chain.

Jim was also interviewed by the Daily Mail following the tragic death of a teenager, who self-medicated using several different drug classes from unregulated, illegal pharmacy websites where no consultation or follow-up was offered.

In addition, the British Medical Association newspaper, BMA News published a three page feature entitled 'The Drug Trades Tangled Web'. The article featured an in depth interview with Jim and throughout the article used findings from the *Counterfeit Superhighway Report* to highlight the problem. This prominent newspaper is distributed to doctors and medical students, and is received by over 143,000 BMA members in the United Kingdom and overseas.



## Drug trade's tangled web



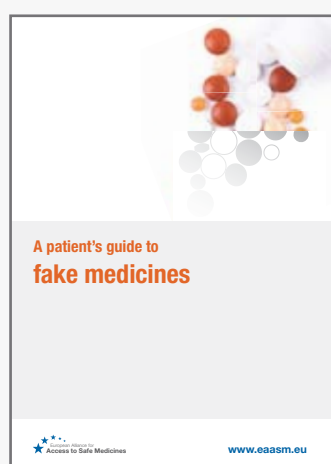
## Pharmaceutical package

We have written in the past about the proposed 'Pharmaceutical Package' put forward by Günter Verheugen, Vice-President of the European Commission. Previously we highlighted the 'watering down' of the Pharmaceutical Package, particularly the removal of the ban on repackaging. The 'watering down' of the package seems at odds with the recent new information on the scale of counterfeiting. This includes the admission by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) that 25,000 packets of counterfeit prescription medicines were given by pharmacists to NHS patients and the shocking results from the European MEDIFAKE operation where in a two month period, European Customs officials seized more than 34 million illegal pills, an alarming number which demonstrates previous estimates have been grossly underestimated. It is also interesting to note that The United Arab Emirates have now banned the repackaging of medicines claiming they have been irrefutably linked to infiltration of the legitimate supply chain.

### 25,000 packets of counterfeit prescription medicines were given by pharmacists to NHS patients

Reports from Singapore state that counterfeit impotence drugs have already claimed the lives of four while three others remain in a coma. If laws are not strengthened, similar cases could soon be common place in Europe. The EAASM once again call on all stakeholders to campaign for action to ensure the strongest patient safety measures available are included and implemented through the pharmaceutical package.

## A patient's guide to fake medicines



In response to the increasing threat of fake medicines both on the internet and in the legitimate supply chain the EAASM has created an educational document for patients – A patient's guide to fake medicines. The guide offers simple advice about the dangers of fake medicines and is available to download from the EAASM website ([www.eaasm.eu/information\\_for\\_patients](http://www.eaasm.eu/information_for_patients)).

It is also interesting to note that the German police have asked for permission to use some of the patient safety information already featured on the EAASM website. This further highlights the value of the website and profile of the EAASM with key stakeholders across Europe.

## A report from the Mexico City Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Anti-counterfeit Medical Products Seminar

Jim was asked to present at the Mexico City APEC Anti-counterfeit Medical Products Seminar, and sent the following report.

"The 3 day seminar was hosted by the Mexican Ministry of External Affairs and attended by delegates from the majority of the APEC economies (countries from North/South/Central America and Asia). I was struck not just by how much of a problem counterfeit medicines are in this region, but by how much excellent work is being done – across sectors – to combat them. Many of the regulators I encountered are doing fantastic work to tighten up their systems and, bearing in mind that some are free-trade staging posts, this can only be good news for us in Europe.



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During the final workshop, Valerio Reggi (co-ordinator of the World Health Organisation IMPACT taskforce) and I were able to secure volunteer support from regulators from Brazil, Peru and Argentina, to devise a series of awareness-raising initiatives. I was particularly pleased that the delegates were keen to propose to APEC that it undertakes a study of internet pharmacy, based on the EAASM's *Counterfeiting Superhighway* research. I've agreed that in the coming months, I'll support the Argentinian regulator in preparing that proposal.

Mexico City is an immense and unusual place and it would be easy to feel insignificant among its 25 million inhabitants. However, I left feeling very much that the 100 or so delegates who met, shared experiences and devised concrete outputs, had done something very significant indeed."