

WCPT joins the battle against "vile" counterfeit medicines



The World Health Professions Alliance – the global collaboration that WCPT formally joined in May – is urging action to end the “vile and serious criminal offence” of counterfeiting medicines and other medical products.

An alliance spokesperson addressed WHO’s World Health Assembly in Geneva in May to make clear that the sale of counterfeit medicines, and their infiltration into legitimate supply chains, could cause death and illness to tens of thousands of people around the world.

“Failure to act against this criminal activity would be a fundamental breach of the trust placed in public health structures by patients,” Ton Hoek, General Secretary of the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) and WHPA spokesperson, told delegates at the World Health Assembly.

Through its member bodies – which include the World Medical Association, the International Council of Nurses and the World Dental Federation as well as the FIP and WCPT – the WHPA represents more than 26 million health professionals worldwide.

So that health care professionals are better equipped to combat counterfeits, the WHPA announced that it is stepping up its commitment to this issue by launching a "Be Aware, Take Action" campaign (www.whpa.org/counterfeit_campaign.htm). The campaign focuses on public health and patient safety issues.

Brenda Myers, WCPT Secretary General, explained why this issue was important for physical therapists.

“It’s important that all health professionals are aware,” she said. “If a patient isn’t responding to medications as expected, it could be because counterfeit medicines are involved. There may be physical therapists who feel that because we are traditionally viewed as drug-less practitioners, the issue doesn’t have anything to do with us. This is an example of a project where all professions have a role, and where, by joining with other

professions, we can try and achieve a change.”

In over 50% of cases, medicines purchased over the Internet from illegal sites that conceal their physical address have been found to be counterfeit. Last year, packages of the antimalarial drug Metakelfin found in 40 pharmacies in Tanzania were found to lack sufficient active ingredient.

The WHPA is calling for:

- involvement by organisations for health professionals, patients, manufacturers, distributors, media and governments;
- education of health professionals;
- education of the public about the risks of buying medical products from unknown and unreliable sources;
- vigilance by health care professionals and patients;
- identification of substandard medical products by international specialised agencies;
- removal of substandard products from the market;
- enforcement of pharmaceutical legislation by national governments.