

How to ensure your drugs are not counterfeit



By **Leslie Morgan**
Managing Director Durbin PLC.
Morgan is a member of the
Royal Pharmaceutical Society of
Great Britain

In an ideal world, the supply of medicines would be a simple and transparent chain that links manufacturer to patient in as few steps as possible. A hospital in Dubai would buy all their products from wholesalers in Dubai, for example. In reality, though, doctors in the Middle East sometimes prescribe products that simply aren't available locally, which means pharmacists then need to source medicines that have been imported from overseas. In what I suppose is a logical sequence of events, the majority of manufacturers rely on wholesalers like Durbin to source and export medicines on their behalf.

The problem is, how can you make sure that the medicine

you're buying is genuine? The pharmaceutical world is no different to many areas of business (the fashion industry is the best example I can think of) in that counterfeit products are becoming more common. Not only is this illegal, of course, but a patient's well-being is also at risk because the active ingredient may be present in a much lower dose or even not present at all; or in some cases, there may be the right amount of the active ingredient, but with a diminished efficacy caused by a change in bioavailability due to different excipients or tablet hardness. The bottom line is, counterfeit products are highly likely to be of a sub-standard quality. For this reason, those of us in the industry who strive to maintain the highest standards possible are determined to help expose and eventually stamp out these illegal practices.

From a UK perspective, wholesalers have a legal (let alone a moral) responsibility to ensure that they only ever buy products from manufacturers that adhere to the Good Manufacturing Practice standards and from suppliers that hold the Wholesaler Dealer Licence certificate. This is issued under strict guidance by the MHRA (Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency). This way we can ensure that products are supplied that have been manufactured to both the

agreed system and to the agreed quality of ingredients. In other words, a genuine medicine (that's the right tablet hardness, dose of active ingredient, efficacy, packaging and transportation) will have certified proof that it's genuine. And if there is no proof then that should set alarm bells ringing.

At Durbin our proof consists of a chain of detailed records. We also regularly check that our suppliers continually renew their licences, though in the near future, the MHRA is moving to a 'continuous licence' system where manufacturers will update licences on a rolling basis, rather than the current system where the licences expire and need renewing. The MHRA is also opening up their database so suppliers can check if licenses have been revoked or suspended.

When it comes to guarding your supply chain, my advice is that if a deal sounds too good to be true, then it probably is. Counterfeiting has become a highly sophisticated global phenomenon with a focus on low-cost, high-turnover, high-demand products. It's a problem that could easily affect the most qualified, dedicated professional. After all, a fake drug looks much like a genuine one. If you're ever in doubt therefore, check and then check again.... **MEH**

Durbin PLC is a British company based in South Harrow, London. Established in 1963, the company specialises in supplying quality assured pharmaceuticals, medical equipment and consumable supplies to healthcare professionals and aid agencies in over 150 countries. As well as reacting rapidly to emergency situations, Durbin PLC responds to healthcare supply needs from local project level to national scale programmes. Web address: www.durbin.co.uk Email: L.morgan@durbin.co.uk