Counterfeit Adderall: just the tip of the iceberg

Last week, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) warned that a counterfeit version of Adderall 30 mg tablets is being sold on the Internet. Moreover, the phony pills are unsafe, ineffective, and potentially harmful.

When the FDA tested a sample of the counterfeit pills, the agency found they contained tramadol and acetaminophen, both pain relievers. In comparison, authentic Adderall pills contain four active ingredients: dextroamphetamine saccharate, amphetamine aspartate, dextroamphetamine sulphate, and amphetamine sulfate.

How can you distinguish the "good" pills from the "bad" pills?

- The counterfeit pills are round, white, and do not have any markings. They come in a blister pack and may have misspellings on the package. For example, "NDS" appears on the package instead of "NDC." "Aspartrte" appears instead of "Aspartate." And "Singel" appears instead of "Single."

- In contrast, authentic Adderall 30 mg tablets, which are produced by Teva Pharmaceutical, are round, orange/peach in color, have "dp" embossed on one side of the tablet, and "30" on the other side. Teva's tablets are only packaged in 100-count bottles with the National Drug Code (NDC) 0555-0768-02 listed on each bottle.
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If you believe that you may have a counterfeit version of Teva's Adderall 30 mg tablets, do not take the product and contact your doctor. Adderall is approved to treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and narcolepsy. It is a prescription drug classified as a controlled substance.

Now for the rest of the story.

According to Dr Graham Jackson, editor of the International Journal of Clinical Practice (IJCP), criminal gangs are increasingly using the internet to market counterfeit medicines, and some have even turned up in legitimate pharmacies.

Global sales of counterfeit medicines are now worth more than $75 billion annually, according to latest estimates, having doubled between 2005 and 2010. Numerous studies have also reported large numbers of websites selling prescription-only drugs without a prescription and people buying internet drugs despite being aware of the dangers.

"Counterfeit medicines pose an ever-increasing threat to public health, including death and inadequate healthcare as a result of self-medication," said Dr. Jackson. "Particularly worrying examples include counterfeit cancer and heart drugs and fake vaccines sold during the swine flu scare.

"The majority of medicines people buy from unverified internet sites are counterfeit and often lack the active ingredients they claim. Others have
variable concentrations of active ingredients or even contain dangerous toxins, such as arsenic, boric acid, leaded road paint, floor and shoe polish, talcum powder, chalk, brick dust and nickel."

The abuse of controlled prescription drugs like Oxycontin, Xanax and Ritalin now exceeds abuse of all illegal drugs combined, except marijuana. The internet is an open channel for the distribution of controlled prescription drugs with no mechanisms to even block sales to children. This is particularly dangerous given that addiction often starts with substance use in adolescence.

Well, there you have it, folks. The counterfeit Adderall problem is just the tip of a tremendous, floating iceberg. Only this iceberg isn't melting, no sir. It's growing so fast that no one really knows just how much harm, including death, lurks beneath the surface.

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