



Getting An Accurate Count Of Counterfeit Drugs

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This is the first article in a four-part [Life Science Leader](#) series examining the current state of the counterfeit medicines problem. Upcoming stories will examine the issue from the perspective of industry giant Pfizer, look at what is being done by one international coalition to fight the crime, identify efforts to educate patients, and profile a company working to put unique identifiers on individual pills.

Experts in pharmaceutical crime describe it as a global game of cat-and-mouse that can be deadly for patients, costly for pharmaceutical companies, and challenging for government agencies responsible for health and safety. What they are referring to is counterfeit drugs. The Center for Medicine in the Public Interest, a New York-based research group partially funded by the pharmaceutical industry, estimates that the sale of fake medicines will generate \$95 billion this year, an increase of 26 percent since 2010.

It is a problem that continues to grow in scale and complexity, says Thomas Kubic, CEO of the Pharmaceutical Security Institute (PSI), a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit organization. “We have seen medicines marked as donations to African nations end up in a Caribbean-based online distribution system targeting U.S. customers,” Kubic says.

According to Kubic, the biggest problem facing the industry 15 years ago was that pharmaceutical crimes were not being pursued by law enforcement, largely because the magnitude of the problem was unknown. In response, industry leaders in 2002 created PSI, taking it upon themselves to provide law enforcement with a more accurate picture of the global pharmaceutical crime problem. Prior to the institute’s creation, the WHO was reporting an average of 50 law-enforcement events involving pharmaceutical crimes per year. Last year, PSI reported 3,002 incidences.

“These numbers more accurately reflect the scope of the problem,” Kubic says. “Nobody knows for sure how big a problem it is; we only see indicators. But, for years, we lacked those basic numbers.”

According to Kubic, the current data indicates that the industry is making progress. “We have seen a significant increase in seizure activity, as well as the dollar value of goods that have been subject to enforcement activity,” Kubic explains. In 2011, PSI reported 18 tons of illegal drugs seized by customs agents, police, and drug regulators. By 2015, that number grew to 423.9 tons.

TRACKING CRIME

One can assume that PSI has been so effective because the organization employs the likes of Kubic. He was once head of operations at the FBI’s Salt Lake City office and, later, was in charge of what was known as the FBI’s white-collar crime division.

Kubic and his similarly trained colleagues at PSI developed their Counterfeit Incidence System (CIS) in 2002. By using case report details, such as the amount of counterfeit product seized, the system tracks