



Washington

wants to know



Online Pharmacies: The Real Story

(NAPSA)—In the quest to get cheap prescription medicines, more and more Americans are turning to the Internet, which could have dangerous consequences.

There are thousands of online drug sellers and more are opening up shop every month. You may be surprised to learn, however, that fewer than 20 are certified by the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy (NABP). The rest face no scrutiny and offer no guarantee that their products are helpful or even safe.

And if you do buy medicine online, consult your doctor and look for the NABP Verified Internet Pharmacy Practice Sites (VIPPS) seal of safety and quality on the Web site.

While some prescription drugs can be found online from foreign sources at less cost, the safety risks outweigh the benefits. These prescription drugs may not be identical versions of U.S. drugs and, even worse, many foreign drugs circumvent inspection, safe handling, labeling and other U.S. safety requirements.

Indeed, even the Canadian government has explicitly stated that it does not inspect prescription drugs passing through Canada on their way to the United States. That means that dealers getting drugs from unapproved, unregulated and unsafe sources can easily use Canada as a pass-through for counterfeit medicines. And many Web sites that display the Canadian flag are not even based in Canada—they exist in the shadowy international marketplace without any regulation.

An imported prescription drug may be an imitation manufac-



Medicines purchased online from non state-licensed pharmacies could be counterfeit.

ured under far less rigorous conditions than here in the United States, so the medicine may not have the consistency of purity or strength you rely on as a patient. It may have no active ingredients or even have toxic effects.

Buying foreign medicines online is not only risky, but also illegal. This is why many Americans are writing to Congress urging them not only to reject prescription drug importation, but to close the existing loopholes that allow counterfeits into our safe system. Anyone can write, on either side of this issue, to the U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C. 20510 and the U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515.

In addition, if you determine or suspect any prescription drugs of being counterfeit, you should alert your doctor or pharmacist, who can call the Food and Drug Administration Medwatch program at 1-800-FDA-1088.

For more information about keeping our medicine supply safe, visit www.safemedicines.org.