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**HEALTH SCIENCES AUTHORITY
PRESS RELEASE**

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HSA PARTICIPATES IN INTERPOL-IMPACT ONLINE GLOBAL OPERATION TARGETING ILLEGAL AND COUNTERFEIT MEDICINES

More than 40 countries have taken part in an international week of action targeting the online sale of counterfeit and illegal medicines to raise awareness of the associated health risks, resulting in arrests across the globe and the seizure of thousands of potentially harmful medicines.

2 Focusing on websites supplying illegal and dangerous medicines, Operation Pangea III is the largest Internet-based action of its kind in support of the International Medical Products Anti-Counterfeiting Taskforce (IMPACT). It was co-ordinated by INTERPOL, the World Customs Organization (WCO), the Permanent Forum of International Pharmaceutical crime (PFIPC), the Heads of Medicines Agencies Working Group of Enforcement Officers (HMA WGEO), the pharmaceutical industry and the electronic payments industry.

3 Carried out between 5 and 12 October and involving police, customs and national medicines regulators with support from Internet Service Providers (ISPs), payment systems providers and delivery services, the global operation targeted the three main components abused in the illegal website trade: the Internet Service Provider (ISP), the electronic payment system and the delivery service.

Local Internet Surveillance Results

4 This is the 3rd time the Health Sciences Authority (HSA) is participating in this concerted international collaboration in the bid to protect public health and safety. For this year, HSA has intensified its checks on suspicious websites during this international Internet week of action, in addition to its on-going Internet surveillance program. Operations were also mounted against illegal medicines sold online.

5 During this week of intensified Internet checks, 26 Internet platforms (ranging from discussion forums, web blogs, auction sites, online classified advertisements and company websites where health products can be possibly offered for sale) were screened for potential non-compliance with Singapore's medicines' legislation. Of these, six individuals are currently under investigation for illegal sale of medicines which include lifestyle medicines such as those for slimming and oral contraceptives.

Consumer Advisory

6 WHO estimates that 50% of prescription medicines purchased over the Internet from the illegal websites that conceal their physical address have been found to be counterfeits. According to a HSA ongoing study which started in July 2010 on parcels containing health products entering Singapore, almost 50% involved Internet purchases and about 30% of the imported products were tested and found to be adulterated.

7 Recognising the challenge in managing the illegal sale of health products over the Internet, Operation Pangea provides INTERPOL, regulatory and enforcement agencies worldwide a platform to enhance public awareness of the risks of purchasing health products over the Internet. It also sends a clear message to potential sellers that regulatory and enforcement agencies worldwide will not tolerate such illegal online activities.

8 It is difficult to verify the authenticity of any website, supplier or the medicines offered for sale over the Internet. The products obtained could contain the wrong active ingredient, wrong proportion of an active ingredient, or even without active ingredient. There could be harmful effects to a person's health or could even be fatal.

9 *“The safety and quality of health products advertised on dubious Internet websites cannot be vouched for. Consuming health products obtained from dubious internet sources may result in severe reactions and even death. Consumers should get the health products they need from reliable sources, such as registered pharmacies or through their doctors,”* says Ms Chan Cheng Leng, Division Director of HSA’s Vigilance, Compliance and Enforcement Division.

10 HSA invites members of the public to refer to its advisory guide on “Dangers of Buying Health Products over the Internet” at http://www.hsa.gov.sg/publish/hsaportal/en/for_consumers/consumer_guides/dangers_of_buying.html.

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▪ **About the Health Sciences Authority (HSA)**

The Health Sciences Authority (HSA) is a multidisciplinary agency that applies medical, pharmaceutical and scientific expertise through its three professional groups, Health Products Regulation, Blood Services, Applied Sciences, to protect and advance national health and safety. It serves as the national regulator for health products, ensuring they are wisely regulated to meet standards of safety, quality and efficacy. It operates the national blood bank, Bloodbank@HSA, securing the nation’s blood supply. It also applies specialised scientific, forensic, investigative and analytical

capabilities in serving the administration of justice. For more details, visit www.hsa.gov.sg.

- **About HSA's Health Products Regulation Group**

The Health Products Regulation Group (HPRG) of HSA contributes to the development of biomedical sciences in Singapore by administering a robust, scientific and responsive regulatory framework. It ensures that drugs, innovative therapeutics, medical devices and health-related products are wisely regulated and meet appropriate safety, quality and efficacy standards.

- **About Operation Pangea III**

Operation Pangea III is an international collaborative project with INTERPOL, WHO IMPACT (World Health Organisation – International Medical Product Anti-Counterfeiting Taskforce) and PFIPC (Permanent Forum on International Pharmaceutical Crime) to intensify surveillance and enforcement efforts against the illegal sale of health products over the Internet from 5 to 12 October 2010. There are a total of 45 countries involved this year.

The objectives of Operation Pangea III are to raise public awareness of the risks of buying health products from unregulated websites, as well as to send messages to potential sellers that regulatory and enforcement agencies worldwide will not tolerate such illegal activities over the Internet.

The first Operation Pangea was conducted on 12 Nov 2008 [designated then as the international Internet day of action] with eight participating countries, including Singapore.

- **About WHO-IMPACT**

WHO-IMPACT (WHO-International Medicinal Products Anti-Counterfeiting Taskforce) was set up in February 2006. Its major aim is to build coordinated networks across and between countries in order to halt the production, trading and selling of fake medicines around the globe. Members in WHO-IMPACT include representatives from national drug regulatory authorities and law enforcement agencies.

- **About PFIPC**

PFIPC (Permanent Forum on International Pharmaceutical Crime) is an international enforcement forum aimed at protecting public health and safety through the exchange of information and ideas to foster mutual cooperation in combating pharmaceutical crimes including counterfeit medicines. Singapore is the first country in Asia to be invited to participate and member countries include Australia, US, UK, Canada, Switzerland and Germany. Annual closed door meetings are held to discuss enforcement issues, future trends and information exchange amongst the countries.