

'OPERATION PANGEA' CRACKS DOWN ON ILLEGAL MEDS

Up to 90,000 dosage units of illegal prescription medicines, worth €375,000, have been detained by the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA), in partnership with Revenue's Customs Service and An Garda Síochána, as part of the Interpol-coordinated Operation Pangea.

Operation Pangea, which took place in mid - October, is an international week of action targeting the online sale of falsified and illegal medicines where Irish authorities joined representatives from 60 other countries to target criminal networks behind the sale of falsified and illegal medicines via illicit online suppliers and online e-commerce platforms.

Simultaneously, it was announced by Interpol that the global 'Operation Pangea XI' resulted in over 10.1 million dosage units of illegal medicines and medical devices, with an estimated value of US\$14 million, being detained across all 61 countries involved.

Globally, 4,990 websites and web pages on social media, e-commerce sites and other advertisement platforms were shut down or were in the process of being shut down.

Breakdown of the 90,000 dosage units of medicines detained in Ireland:

- *Anabolic steroids: 29,518 units
- *Sedatives: 25,241 units
- *Analgesics: 5,477 units
- *Erectile dysfunction: 5,700 units
- *Other (small quantities): 14,009 units

In line with the approach taken in Operation Pangea, the HPRA, Revenue's Customs Service and An Garda Síochána have targeted, on an ongoing basis throughout 2018, illegal online supplies, including through social media, coming into and within Ireland.

This ongoing action has, from 1 January to the end of September, led to the detention of nearly 400,000 dosage units of illegally supplied online medicines valued at €1.39 million. This ongoing focus in Ireland has also resulted in 14 social media pages and 10 e-commerce advertisements being taken offline. In addition, 56 websites were investigated to force them to either close or cease selling medicines into Ireland.

CUTTING ONLINE SOURCES

Dr Lorraine Nolan, HPRA Chief Executive, said: "Laboratory analysis of products detained has shown they often contain too little or too much of the active ingredient. They have also been found to contain harmful or undeclared substances. These results demonstrate the importance of national and international



HPRA's Dr Lorraine Nolan pictured with the haul of illegal prescription medicines, worth €375,000, recently detained as part of 'Operation Pangea', co-ordinated by Interpol.

collaboration amongst enforcement agencies to prevent potentially dangerous medicines from reaching the public.

"Supply of anabolic steroids from online sources continues to be prevalent in Ireland, in addition to face-to-face sales. We advise that people should not use anabolic steroids unless prescribed for them by a doctor for a medical reason as misuse of these products can cause serious physical and psychological health issues," Dr Nolan says.

The HPRA has launched a campaign entitled 'ZeroGains', which aims to highlight these health risks. The website www.zerogains.ie provides information on the real risks of anabolic steroid use, practical advice to help anyone who is suffering from health issues associated with use, and also provides details on how members of the public can report concerns to us about the illegal sale and supply of anabolic steroids.

The support of Operation Pangea by social media and technology companies, the electronic payments sector and the pharmaceutical industry highlights the level of collaboration taking place between the health product regulators, law enforcement agencies and the private sector in combating the illegal supply of medicines and medical devices.

Operation Pangea has grown extensively since it first took place in 2008 involving, at that time, just eight countries, including Ireland. It is co-ordinated by Interpol, together with the World Customs Organisation (WCO), the Permanent Forum on International Pharmaceutical Crime (PFIPC), the European Heads of Medicines Agencies Working Group of Enforcement Officers (WGEO), the Pharmaceutical Security Institute and Europol.