

Counterfeit drugs lead to charges in Florida

The US has cracked down on the sale of counterfeit prescription drugs by charging 19 people in Florida with racketeering, organized fraud and illegal drug sales. They allegedly sold phony, expired, relabelled and diluted medications, including atorvastatin and celecoxib.

A 95-page indictment says the ring stole prescription drugs or bought them for pennies on the dollar from patients, doctors and pharmacists. They then sold them through shell companies in Florida and 6 other states. On July 1, Florida began enforcing a new law that increases the penalties for altering drugs, and makes it more difficult to obtain a distribution licence.

Nationally, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is exploring a variety of measures to make it more difficult to sell counterfeit drugs. “The dangers of counterfeit drugs are real, and we must protect consumers,” stated Tommy Thompson, the secretary of health and human services.

Although drug counterfeiting remains “relatively” rare, the FDA reports it is becoming more common. Health Canada issued a warning about counterfeit atorvastatin July 7, but a spokesperson said there have been no reports of the tablets being used in Canada. — *Barbara Sibbald, CMAJ*

UK coroners face reform following murders by MD

The murders committed by Harold Shipman have led to an overhaul of England’s centuries-old coroners’ service.

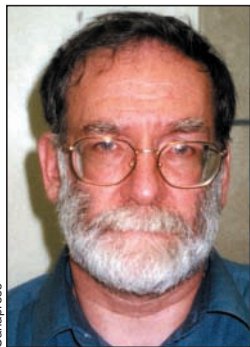
This reform follows a 2-year inquiry into the actions of the British GP, who murdered 215 patients over 23 years. Investigators found that he was able to hide some crimes due to the lack of official control over death certificates. For example, he duped a colleague into providing a second signature on some of his victims’ certificates. The new reforms

require that the doctor providing the second signature must be independent and accredited by a statutory medical assessor.

Britain’s coroners’ service dates to 1275, when the duties of the *custos placitorum coronae* — “keeper of the Crown’s pleas” — were first written into law. For years coroners have been selected by local officials, who also paid their salaries, but they could be removed from office only by order of Britain’s lord chancellor.

The 122 reforms include a list of “second doctors” to sign death certificates.

“It is essential that we build an effective system that commands public confidence,” said Paul Goggins, junior Home Office minister. — *Mary Helen Spooner, West Sussex, UK*



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Dr. Harold Shipman:
Could you sign this?