Would You Know a Fake Online Pharmacy? Pharmacist Warns Patients as £2m Counterfeit Weight-Loss Medicines Seized

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London, UK – 29 October 2026: A major seizure of counterfeit weight-loss medicines has prompted a warning from a leading UK pharmacist that patients must learn to distinguish legitimate online pharmacies from illegal sellers before putting their health at risk.

On 14 October, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), working with West Midlands Police, seized more than 12,000 counterfeit weight-loss pens during a raid on an industrial unit in Birmingham. The products had an estimated value of £2 million, while officers also recovered packaging for approximately 30,000 additional products.

The discovery highlights a growing challenge for consumers: in an increasingly digital healthcare market, a professional-looking website is no guarantee that the medicines being offered are genuine, safe or legally supplied.

Boo Dhaliwal, pharmacist and CEO of online pharmacy Pharmacy Planet, believes patients need to look beyond appearances.

“People have become very comfortable buying things online, and healthcare is no exception. That's not necessarily a bad thing. Online pharmacies can make healthcare more accessible, convenient and discreet.”

“But there's a fundamental difference between buying a pair of trainers and buying prescription medication. If the trainers are fake, you've wasted your money. If the medicine is fake, you could be putting your health, or even your life, at risk.”

“A convincing website, attractive branding and a competitive price tell you absolutely nothing about whether the business behind them is a legitimate pharmacy.”

The scale of illegal medicine trading is significant.

Earlier this year, the MHRA revealed that nearly 20 million doses of illegally traded medicines, with an estimated street value approaching £45 million, had been seized during 2025. Enforcement activity also disrupted more than 1,500 websites and social media accounts involved in illegal medicine sales.

Weight-loss treatments have become a particular concern as demand increases, with criminals seeking to exploit patients looking for faster, cheaper or more convenient access.

Unlike medicines supplied through legitimate pharmacies, illegally manufactured or counterfeit products may contain incorrect doses, undeclared ingredients or harmful contaminants. Some may contain no genuine active ingredient at all.

Dhaliwal, whose pharmacy experience spans more than two decades, is also a director of **Touchwood Pharmacy**, a community pharmacy group operating more than **20 branches across London, the South East and Midlands.**

He believes the distinction between genuine pharmacy services and unregulated online sellers must become clearer to consumers.

“Pharmacy isn't simply about supplying a product. There are professional responsibilities behind every prescription, from assessing whether treatment is appropriate to checking safety, interactions and potential risks.”

“Patients should expect those safeguards whether they're visiting a pharmacy on their high street or accessing a service online.”

“The technology may have changed how we deliver healthcare, but it hasn't changed our professional obligations.”

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Five Checks Before Buying Medicine Online

1. Check pharmacy registration. Verify the pharmacy through the General Pharmaceutical Council's official online register, rather than relying on a logo displayed on the website.

2. Look for a genuine clinical assessment. Prescription-only medicines should not be supplied without a valid prescription and appropriate clinical safeguards.

3. Verify the business behind the website. Look for clear business details, a registered pharmacy address and accessible contact information.

4. Be suspicious of unrealistic promises. Extremely low prices, guaranteed results and offers to bypass prescriptions should raise immediate concerns.

5. Avoid unregulated social media sellers. Medicines advertised through private messages, informal online groups or unverified accounts may be counterfeit or illegally supplied.

Dhaliwal added:

“We shouldn't be frightening people away from online healthcare. We should be helping them recognise what safe, legitimate online healthcare looks like.”

“My advice is simple: before trusting a website with your health, take a moment to verify who is actually behind it.”

“Trust should never be something a pharmacy asks you to assume. It should be something patients can verify.”

The MHRA encourages anyone concerned about suspicious medicines or illegal online sellers to consult its **#FakeMeds** guidance and report suspected problems.

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