



Beware of Online Pharmacies

by ROBERT PUGACH, MD

I'm often asked by my patients if they can purchase their medications from online pharmacies. I always respond with a resounding NO! My advice is supported by a recent FDA report warning consumers about the dangers of buying medications from the more than 40,000 online pharmacies. The report estimates 70% of online pharmacies may be illegal and sell drugs of questionable quality and purity.

Furthermore, don't be fooled by online pharmacies that claim they work with doctors. I ask you, what reputable, licensed doctor would put his or her license on the line prescribing drugs for patients they have never met?

Let me outline a few of the significant dangers of ordering medications from online pharmacies:

• **QUALITY** - What's in the medication you are purchasing online? If the online pharmacy claims they can sell you a brand name drug that costs \$10 per pill in a retail store for \$3, where are they getting it from? Brand name manufacturers are not likely to provide the medication for a fraction of what it costs normally. If it's a brand name product then there's no generic equivalent. So what is actually in the pill that you purchase?

• **PURITY and ACCURACY** - One of the reasons that medications are so expensive is that the manufacturing process is strictly regulated to ensure that there is purity and accuracy in the preparation. Is the stated amount of a medicine correct? In other words is 250 mg really 250 mg or are there a lot of fillers and binders? If the medication doesn't contain the exact dosage, you won't get the benefit you're expecting and the health consequences can be severe.

• **CONTAMINATION** - If an online pharmacy is compounding a drug, are they doing it in a sterile environment? Has the medication been contaminated with bacteria or viruses? Were masks and gloves used by the personnel involved in the manufacturing process? As the current meningitis outbreak due to improper manufacturing processes at the New England Compounding Pharmacy demonstrates, serious impurities can infect the products made by these online compounding pharmacies. Those impurities can, in turn, cause death or serious illnesses from infections to gastrointestinal problems.

Please be careful when purchasing your medications. Remember - you get what you pay for!

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