

Examples of Patients Harmed by Medications Purchased from Illegal Online Drug Sellers

These are just a few illustrations, in chronological order, of the serious and growing global problem of illegal online drug sellers.

On February 12, 2001, U.S. citizen Ryan Haight died from adverse reactions to painkillers that he purchased over the Internet. He was only required to fill out a questionnaire that was “examined” by a doctor who had never met him.¹

On December 17, 2006, Craig Schmidt, a 30-year-old plastics salesman, purchased Xanax (an anxiety drug) and Ultram (a painkiller) from an online drug seller without seeing or speaking to the doctor that prescribed the medications. After taking the drugs, he nearly died and has been left permanently impaired with brain damage that inhibits him from driving or even walking without stumbling.²

Marcia Bergeron, a Canadian resident and US citizen, died in 2006 from heavy metal poisoning caused by the contaminated prescription medications she had purchased from an illicit online pharmacy. Otherwise healthy, the coroner determined that Bergeron died of cardiac arrhythmia caused by metal toxicity from counterfeit medication. According to the coroner, the website where Marcia bought her medicines looked reputable as did the box of pills, but the drugs were actually shipped from overseas and had high levels of lead, titanium, and arsenic, which caused her death.³

On May 22, 2008, a man from Wichita, Kansas died from an accidental overdose of drugs he received from an online pharmacy. He obtained these drugs without ever visiting a doctor. The man's wife described her husband as "an addict ----and that the Internet sites that sold him the drugs were his pushers."⁴

Steven Kovacs was a 22-year old aspiring psychologist in New York when he started buying medication online after first being prescribed Adderall, used to treat attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, and Xanax, used to treat anxiety. Steven died of a prescription drug overdose on July 8, 2009 after mixing, Adderall, Xanax and OxyContin.⁵

Lorna Lambden, a 27-year old London paramedic, was found dead in her apartment on December 17, 2010 after she accidentally ingested a fatal dose of medication purchased from an illicit foreign online pharmacy. The coroner report found four-times the therapeutic level of the drug, Amitrptylene in her blood.⁶

In January of 2010, 150 patients were admitted to hospitals in Singapore after taking counterfeit Tadalafil and herbal preparations that claimed to cure erectile dysfunction. Seven (7) of the patients were comatose and four (4) subsequently died from the online drugs which contained powerful ingredients used to treat diabetes.⁷

On June 3, 2011, an emergency room doctor, from Texas, suffered a stroke from ingesting counterfeit Alli from www.2daydietsshopping.com. The counterfeit Alli was produced using the controlled substance sibutramine, rather than the approved ingredient orlistat, and then shipped to the US for redistribution. Two individuals operated the site. The first is a Chinese citizen who has been sentenced to 7 years in federal prison, \$504,815.39 in restitution to victims, and deportation following his sentence. The second US citizen received three years probation.⁸

On April 4, 2012, a mother and son in Los Angeles were looking for cold medication. They purchased and fell victim to a counterfeit drug "vitamin injection." The victim's heart rate increased rapidly, experienced severe headaches, dramatic weight loss, pass-outs and numbness in lips. The victim was eventually hospitalized.⁹

On April 23, 2013, Sarah Houston, a 23-year old medical student in the United Kingdom, obsessed with her weight, purchased DNP, a deadly diet pill, through an online drug seller. The pill, sold as a weight loss aid through many illicit online pharmacies, is actually a pesticide with lethal consequences to humans.¹⁰

On June 25, 2014, Aidan Karpenko, 19, was found dead just hours after taking a single Etizolam pill that was purchased by his friend on the Internet. Etizolam is a medication used to treat anxiety, insomnia and panic attacks. The drug is not licensed or regulated in the UK, however it is licensed in Japan and India.¹¹

In December of 2014, an illegal weight loss product caused the hospitalization of two people in Singapore for hallucinations and acute kidney failure. The products, Nutri Drops Grapefruit Diet and Nutrex Research Adipodex, were purchased through the online marketplace, Carousell.¹²

On January 3, 2015, Kelly Best, a 19-year-old man, died after taking counterfeit OxyContin that contained a high dose of fentanyl, a powerful opioid. Best is the third person in Saskatoon to be killed by the pills within 6 months according to Canadian police.¹³

¹ "Don't underestimate the danger of drugs from abroad" San Diego Union-Tribune (February 25, 2011);

<http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/2011/feb/25/dont-underestimate-the-danger-of-drugs-from-abroad/>

² "Online Extra: The Deadly Side Effects of Net Pharmacies" Bloomberg Businessweek (December 18, 2006);

<http://www.businessweek.com/stories/2006-12-17/online-extra-the-deadly-side-effects-of-net-pharmacies>

³ "Counterfeit Pills Bought Online Leads to Death, Coroner Confirms," The Times Colonist (July 6, 2007);

<http://www.canada.com/victoriatimescolonist/news/story.html?id=05142ca2-9796-4868-bf42-76e939915fa5&k=29039>

⁴ "Widow: My Husband Died from Online Drugs" CNN (May 22, 2008);

<http://www.cnn.com/2008/HEALTH/05/21/online.drugs/index.html?iref=allsearch>

⁵ "Mom, Schumer urge Web Pharmacy Crackdown," Newsday, United States (July 10, 2011); <http://www.newsday.com/long-island/mom-schumer-urge-web-pharmacy-crackdown-1.3016581>

⁶ "Paramedic died after taking tablets she bought over the Internet to help her sleep," The Daily Mail, United Kingdom (May 20, 2011); <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1388795/Paramedic-Lorna-Lambden-died-overdosing-sleeping-tablets.html>

⁷ "Counterfeit Internet Drugs Pose Significant Risks and Discourage Vital Health Checks," Science Daily (January 20, 2010).

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/01/100120085348.htm>

⁸ "June 3, 2011: Chinese National Sentenced to Federal Prison for Trafficking Counterfeit Pharmaceutical Weight Loss Drug" U.S. Department of Justice; <http://www.fda.gov/ICECI/CriminalInvestigations/ucm257912.htm>

⁹ "Cracking Down on Counterfeit Drugs" San Diego Union-Tribune (April 4, 2012);

<http://www.utsandiego.com/news/2012/apr/04/cracking-down-counterfeit-drugs/?page=1#article>

¹⁰ "Banned slimming drug kills medical student: Coroner attacks online dealers who target the vulnerable" The Daily Mail, United Kingdom (April 22, 2013); <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-2312986/Sarah-Houston-Banned-slimming-drug-DNP-kills-medical-student-coroner-attacks-online-dealers-target-vulnerable.html>

¹¹ "One pill can kill" warning after death of popular Chesterfield teen" Derbyshire Times, United Kingdom (November 27, 2014); <http://www.derbyshiretimes.co.uk/news/grassroots/one-pill-can-kill-warning-after-death-of-popular-chesterfield-teen-1-6973111>

¹² "Illegal weight loss products land two in hospital: HSA" Channel NewsAsia, Singapore (December 10, 2014);

<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/illegal-weight-loss/1521426.html>

¹³ "Counterfeit OxyContin claims another life in Canada" Securing Industry (January 12, 2015);

<http://www.securindustry.com/pharmaceuticals/counterfeit-oxycontin-claims-another-life-in-canada/s40/a2233/#.VTFT2JM0PvI>