

November 08, 2004

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## **Counterfeit drugs cost profits and lives**

BY TIMES ONLINE

Counterfeit medicines are becoming a major source of finance for organised crime and terrorist groups, according to a report published today.

Profits from fake pharmaceuticals can be larger than from narcotics like heroin and cocaine, but the trade carries a lower risk for traffickers because law enforcement agencies are not as aware of the problem, the report by Stockholm Network, the research organisation, said.

The report will concern large drugs companies, which are already facing increased research and development costs and who are struggling to bring new blockbuster products to the market. Competition from fake drugs will also increase the adverse affects dealt out by cheap generics.

Graham Satchwell, who wrote the report, warned that bogus medicines could be harming or even killing patients in the UK. In China, around 100,000 people died last year as a result of taking counterfeit medicines.

Mr Satchwell, a former detective superintendent and one-time spokesman on counterfeit goods for the Association of Chief Police Officers, called for legitimate manufacturers, governments and police forces to get together to draw up a united European response to the problem.

He told the BBC: "There is no doubt that organised crime globally is involved in the manufacture of pharmaceuticals. I would say the problem is about 10 years old.

"There is a tremendous amount of money to be made. The return on pharmaceuticals is greater than the return on illicit drugs.

"What is more, not only can you make as much money, but law enforcement is not looking in that direction, so consequently the risk of detection is much less."

There was a far higher level of awareness of the crime in areas like China and Africa, where forgeries tend to be much more crude and illness and deaths can more easily be linked to the consumption of counterfeit drugs, said Mr Satchwell.

"In Western societies, where the drugs are often finished and packaged very well indeed, it is very hard to detect," he said.

"Very often, we wouldn't know if people had died [as a result of the fake drug] or not."

Mr Satchwell said a solution to the problem need not be expensive.

"I don't think there is a need to spend a lot of money," he said.

"It is only a question of manufacturers, politicians, law enforcement, regulatory agencies working together to establish what is the extent of the problem in the UK and Europe and working together to put a solution in place."