Over 7 million UK adults may be gambling their lives with fake medicine\textsuperscript{1, 2}

\textit{Research reveals how people are jeopardising their health by avoiding healthcare professionals and purchasing medicine from illicit online sources}

***

\textbf{London, 3 November 2009.} More than one in seven British adults surveyed (15\%)\textsuperscript{1} admitted to bypassing the healthcare system to get hold of prescription only medicine without a prescription, a practice which 78\% of GPs surveyed say is putting people’s health and potentially lives at risk\textsuperscript{3}, as some of the medicines obtained in this way may be counterfeit.

New research indicating the scale of the counterfeit medicine culture was released today as part of a hard-hitting campaign to educate the public of the risks involved in purchasing fake medicines from unregulated websites. The Get Real, Get A Prescription public awareness campaign is being launched in a partnership between Pfizer, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain (RPSGB), The Patients Association and HEART UK.

Without recognising the dangers associated with counterfeit medicine, UK adults are putting too much trust in illicit websites that are potentially selling them. Research suggests that the majority (60\%) of adults agree that they’re more trusting of all purchases they make online today compared to five years ago\textsuperscript{1}. In addition, alarmingly almost a fifth (18\%) of UK adults believe people who sell prescription only medicine without a prescription, are providing a service to the general public – offering cheaper medicines to those that need it\textsuperscript{1}. A third (33\%) simply think what’s being sold is real thing, sourced from legitimate places and sold on\textsuperscript{1}.

David Pruce from the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain said: “Pharmacists are very concerned about the increase in fake or counterfeit medicines. As expert professionals in medicines and medicines use, we know only too well that fake
medication does not work and that it can cause harm. Stay safe by ensuring that you always get your prescriptions dispensed at a registered UK pharmacy. If you want to buy medicines online, always check that you are dealing with a genuine pharmacy. Don’t go on face value – some of the illegal sites look very professional but supply dangerous fakes. Check our website for a list of sites that have been awarded the RPSGB’s internet pharmacy logo so that you can be sure that you are dealing with a UK registered pharmacy supplying genuine medicines. This campaign is important. We want the UK to be the safest place to obtain medicines.”

Steve Poulton, Pfizer UK Commercial Director and Business Unit Head, said: “We are thrilled to be partnering the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain in this deliberately hard-hitting campaign, aiming to push the counterfeit medicines issue up the agenda and discourage consumers from by-passing the health system. Pharmacists play a key role in delivering healthcare services and enhancing the patient experience, something Pfizer supports through a range of activities such as this campaign.”

Pfizer, the RPSGB, and the other campaign partners have been working with pharmacists across the UK to help them leverage public interest in this issue, as a patient education opportunity.

A hard-hitting TV advertisement, which is considered so shocking that it can only be shown after 11pm, will kick-off the campaign on Tuesday 3rd November. A national billboard poster campaign will also run nationwide in November, with a consumer roadshow touring seven cities over the next week. Consumers can go to www.realdanger.co.uk for more information and advice.

- ends -

For further media information, please contact:
The Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain’s Public Relations Unit on 020 7572 2653; Charlotte Binstead/ Kate Aldous at The Red Consultancy on 020 7025 6500 or pfizerteam@redconsultancy.com
Or, the Pfizer press office 0845 300 8033 or pressofficeUK@pfizer.com

Date of preparation: October 2009
Notes to Editors

- The Get Real, Get A Prescription campaign is supported by Pfizer, the MHRA, RPSGB (the professional and regulatory body for pharmacy), The Patients Association and HEART UK.
- It is estimated that between 50 -90% of medicines now purchased over the internet are counterfeit, with global sales in fake medicines expected to reach $75 billion by 2010. Here in the UK, two thirds of GPs surveyed (67%) have seen patients who have obtained medicines from illicit sources.
- Fake medicines can contain harmful ingredients such as rat poison, boric acid and lead paint. They’re often produced by people with no appropriate qualifications and can include too much, too little or none of the active ingredient they should include. Fake medicines can cause harm to patients, which can sometimes lead to death.
- If you have been offered what you suspect to be counterfeit medicines, or have seen them for sale, or have bought them, we would like you to tell us. The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) is the medicines safety watchdog and has a dedicated 24 hour hotline: 020 7084 2701, E-mail: counterfeit@mhra.gsi.gov.uk or write to: Counterfeits, The Intelligence Unit, MHRA, Market Towers, 1 Nine Elms Lane, London, SW8 5NQ.
- If you think a medicine or herbal medicine has caused an unwanted side effect (an adverse drug reaction), please report the problem to the MHRA’s Yellow Card scheme http://yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk/. The Yellow Card scheme has been used for over 40 years to collect information on suspected side effects from all types of medicines. These include prescription medicines, medicines you can buy without a prescription, and herbal and other complementary medicines.
- If you are worried about a suspected side effect, contact a doctor or pharmacist, or call NHS Direct in England and Wales on 0845 46 47 or NHS24 in Scotland on 08454 24 24 24.
- The RPSGB provides a list of legitimate, approved online pharmacies on its website for people to check before they buy from an online source: http://www.rpsgb.org.uk

About the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain (RPSGB) is the professional body for pharmacists and the regulatory body for pharmacists and pharmacy technicians in England, Scotland and Wales. The primary objectives of the Society are to lead, regulate, develop and represent the profession of pharmacy.

The RPSGB leads and supports the development of the profession within the context of the public benefit. This includes the advancement of science, practice, education and knowledge in pharmacy. In addition, it promotes the profession’s policies and views to a range of external stakeholders in a number of different forums.

Following the publication in 2007 of the Government White Paper Trust, Assurance and Safety - The Regulation of Health Professionals in the 21st Century, the Society is working towards the demerger of its regulatory and professional roles. This will see the establishment of a new General Pharmaceutical Council and a new professional body for pharmacy in 2010.

About Pfizer

Pfizer Inc, founded in 1849, is dedicated to better health and greater access to healthcare for people and their valued animals. Every day, colleagues in more than 150 countries work to discover, develop, manufacture and deliver quality, clinically effective prescription medicines to patients.
In the UK, Pfizer has its European R&D headquarters at Sandwich and its UK business headquarters in Surrey, and is the major supplier of medicines to the NHS. Pfizer invested over £5.4 billion worldwide (£104 million per week) in R&D in 2008.

**About a healthy partnership™**

*a healthy partnership* was launched by Pfizer in 2008 as a new approach to support the increasingly important role of community pharmacy in the delivery of healthcare and new services being offered to patients. It covers three areas highlighted as being important by pharmacists: Supporting professional development, enhancing the patient experience and delivering commercial value.

**References**

2. 7.1 million calculated using Office National Statistics Census 2007. 15% of UK adults aged 18 and over = 7,179,660
8. Pfizer data on file