



### Web Drugs Costly

Overseas Internet pharmacies attract some US consumers looking for a bargain, but many US pharmacies offer less expensive generic versions of the same drugs, according to new data from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

A recent FDA examination of the foreign drugs that were intercepted on their way to US consumers found that 45% of the products are available in the United States as FDA-approved generic drugs. Additionally, half of the drugs are available through national pharmacy chains that fill generic prescriptions for \$4 each, significantly less than is charged by Internet pharmacies, according to the FDA. Some examples of intercepted drugs available as low-cost generics at US pharmacies are amoxicillin capsules, fluoxetine capsules, levothyroxine tablets, and warfarin tablets.

With many of the intercepted drugs, investigators found safety problems such as inadequate labeling, unsafe packaging, or inappropriate doses. Others have been withdrawn from the US market because of safety or efficacy concerns. Complete lists of intercepted drugs with cost and safety issues are available at <http://www.fda.gov/bbs/topics/NEWS/2007/NEW01663.html>.

### Alcoholism Subtypes

Scientists from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) have identified 5 distinct subtypes of alcoholism, some of which defy the traditional stereotype of alcoholism.

In the past, efforts to identify subtypes of alcoholism have relied on data from individuals receiving treatment for the condition. But only about 25% of alcoholics ever receive treatment (Dawson DA et al. *Addiction*. 2005;100[3]:281-292), so subtypes derived from samples of individuals in treatment are likely to be skewed. To get a representative picture of alcoholism subtypes, the NIAAA scientists analyzed the responses of nearly 1500 indi-

viduals with *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (Fourth Edition) (DSM-IV) alcohol dependence who responded to the 2001-2002 National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions, a nationally representative survey of more than 40 000 US residents. They found that nearly 20% of individu-



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als with alcohol dependence are highly functional, are well educated, and have high incomes (Moss HB et al. *Drug Alcohol Depend*. doi:10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2007.05.016 [In press]). Analysis of the data revealed that the individuals could be grouped into 5 subtypes: young adult, young antisocial, functional, intermediate familial, and chronic severe. More information about the subtypes is available at <http://www.nih.gov/news/pr/jun2007/niaaa-28.htm>.

### Hospital Infection Monitoring

Hospitals throughout the United States now have the opportunity to join a national Web-based surveillance network that will enable them to track—and possibly prevent—safety problems facing patients and staff in their facilities.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention initially launched the National Healthcare Safety Network in 2005 with about 600 select facilities partici-

pating. Now, the agency is opening this voluntary surveillance and reporting system to all US hospitals and outpatient dialysis centers.

The network was designed to collect and analyze data on health care-associated adverse events from a sample of health care facilities to enable the agency to identify trends in such events, gauge adherence to prevention strategies, evaluate the efficacy of prevention strategies, and conduct multifacility studies. It also was intended to help facilities identify and address their own problems in a timely manner, and to provide them with comparative data from other facilities. In addition, the network allows data to be shared among multiple facilities in a hospital chain or between a facility and public health agencies. For more information, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/nhsn.html>.

### SARS Antibodies

Scientists hoping to protect against future outbreaks of SARS have identified human antibodies that may act against several SARS virus strains.

Two strains of SARS virus of animal origin caused outbreaks of SARS in humans in 2002-2003 and 2003-2004. Researchers believe that future outbreaks caused by novel strains of SARS virus are likely, so developing therapeutics or vaccines that are effective against a variety of strains is important. A multinational team of researchers has identified two human antibodies, m396 and S230.15, that may offer such protection (Zhu Z et al. *Proc Natl Acad Sci USA*. 2007;104[27]:12123-12128). The team identified S230.15 by scanning a large library of antibodies from healthy human volunteers, seeking antibodies that bind the SARS virus. The group isolated m396 from samples taken from an individual who survived SARS. Tests in human cells and mice verified that, alone and in combination, the antibodies offered protection from several strains of the virus. —Bridget M. Kuehn