What your patients must know about Rx shopping online

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What’s the news: With millions of newly unemployed Americans facing the prospect of losing access to the prescription drugs they need, physicians are being urged to raise awareness with their patients about the dangers of shopping online for cheap medicines.

The National Association of Boards of Pharmacy (NABP) notes that 95% of websites that sell prescription-only medicine are doing so outside the law, without licenses to dispense medication in the U.S. They are dispensing medications that “are foreign, unapproved, substandard, and counterfeit,” the NABP’s Executive Director/Secretary Lemrey “Al” Carter, PharmD, MS, RPh, wrote in a recent letter to the AMA.

“Most consumers are unaware of these risks of buying medication from any of the tens of thousands of fake online pharmacies engaging in these practices. Substandard and counterfeit medications may contain too much, too little, or none of the active pharmaceutical ingredients the patient needs,” Carter noted. “They may contain toxic fillers, contaminants, or may not have been stored as necessary to maintain efficacy.”

Why it’s important: Too often, patients will turn to online pharmacies for convenience or in an attempt to save money, “not realizing the risks these sites pose,” the NABP says.

“So-called Canadian pharmacies shipping to consumers in the U.S. do so without the proper licenses. They source medications from outside the tightly regulated U.S. supply chain,” the NABP’s letter notes. Such sites often sell medications that lack approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

According to NABP, among other things a safe online pharmacy will:

- Be licensed in the country or jurisdiction in which they are located.
- Accept only therapeutically valid prescriptions.
- Comply with drug laws and professional practice laws.

URL: https://www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/public-health/what-your-patients-must-know-about-rx-shopping-online

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Comply with privacy laws and ensure patient confidentiality. Provide readily accessible contact information for patient care inquiries and provide timely responses.

Websites using the pharmacy domain have been verified as safe by the NABP.

**Learn more:** NABP operates the safe.pharmacy website. Patients and physicians using that site can enter any URL of any online pharmacy to find out whether it is safe or not recommended.

Find out more at the AMA’s TruthInRx website about why we need drug-price transparency now. Also, learn about AMA policy on prescription drug importation and drug safety.