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**HEALTH SCIENCES AUTHORITY
PRESS RELEASE
23 OCTOBER 2018**

HSA SEIZED WEIGHT LOSS PRODUCTS AND ILLEGAL MEDICINES WORTH ABOUT \$9,000 DURING AN INTERPOL-COORDINATED INTERNATIONAL OPERATION

The Health Sciences Authority (HSA) participated in the eleventh edition of Operation Pangea, an Internet-based enforcement action coordinated by INTERPOL over the period of 9 to 16 October 2018. During that week, HSA intensified surveillance against local websites to detect and disrupt the online sale of illegal health products in Singapore. 4,520 units of illegal health products with an estimated total street value of \$9,000 were seized. The seized products included weight loss products and illegal medicines. Two persons are currently assisting HSA in the investigations. Please refer to **Annex A** for photographs of the products seized.

WEIGHT LOSS PRODUCTS REMAIN POPULAR ONLINE

2 Weight loss products made up the majority of the seized products from all the Operation Pangea exercises. Of the illegal sales postings detected during the enforcement week this year, more than 90% were weight loss products. These products promised anything from “quick weight loss”, “fast fat burner” to “suppresses appetite”, while purporting to be “100% natural” or made of “herbal ingredients”. However, consumers need to be wary that such products may not be as harmless as they claim to be. When HSA tested the seized weight loss products, they were found to contain the banned substance sibutramine¹, and some potent medicinal ingredients.

3 From 2013 to September 2018, HSA detected 39 different products marketed for weight loss that were tested and found to be adulterated with sibutramine, ephedrine, pseudoephedrine² and potent laxatives. In the same period, there were

¹ Sibutramine was previously available as a prescription-only weight loss drug but has been withdrawn from Singapore since 2010. This was due to an increased risk of heart attacks and strokes, as well as other serious adverse effects such as hallucinations or hearing voices, palpitations and breathlessness.

² Ephedrine and pseudoephedrine are used as medicines to relieve blocked nose and cough for the treatment of common cold, flu and allergies.

five serious adverse event reports associated with adulterated weight loss products. These included hallucinations, breathing difficulties and heart palpitations.

DETECTION OF UNREGISTERED MEDICINES

4 HSA also seized a total of 500 modafinil³ tablets which were sent to Singapore from overseas sellers. Modafinil is a prescription medicine which is not registered locally. Self-medicating with it can be harmful. Unless authorised by HSA for use in special circumstances by a doctor for patients under his care, the sale of unregistered health products such as modafinil is an offence. Investigations are ongoing.

5 Modafinil carries a potential risk of dependency due to its stimulant effect on the brain. It can also cause serious adverse effects such as heart problems, hypertension and psychiatric conditions such as anxiety, hallucinations or mania. Earlier this year, a woman in her 30s was hospitalised for serious skin reactions after taking modafinil to improve her alertness⁴. She had developed Stevens-Johnson syndrome, a life-threatening skin condition with blistering and severe peeling of the skin. The woman also experienced multiple mouth ulcers and conjunctivitis (red eyes).

CONSUMER ADVISORY

6 Members of the public are advised that:

- Caution is needed when buying health products online. It is not certain what these products contain, and where and how they were made. They could potentially be counterfeits or adulterated with undeclared potent or banned ingredients which can seriously harm one's health.
- Be wary of health products that promise or deliver quick and miraculous results or carry exaggerated claims like "100% safe", "no side effects" or "quick results".
- Products bought online may be cheaper and appear to offer better value. In reality, however, the lower price could be due to unsafe or inferior ingredients, poor manufacturing methods and substandard or unhygienic storage conditions.
- If buying online, consider buying your health products from websites with an established retail presence in Singapore.

³ Modafinil is available in some countries as a prescription drug that reduces excessive sleepiness associated with specific medical conditions such as narcolepsy.

⁴ https://www.hsa.gov.sg/content/hsa/en/News_Events/Press_Releases/2018/modafinilskinreactions.html

- Weight loss drugs that are approved by HSA are available only from a doctor or pharmacist as these are potent medications which should only be taken under medical supervision. There is no quick and easy way to lose weight – it's about achieving and maintaining a lifestyle that incorporates the principles of healthy eating and active living.
- Modafinil is a potent medicine which is not registered in Singapore. Inappropriate use of modafinil by healthy individuals, such as to stay alert or improve focus, can cause serious adverse effects.

EFFORTS IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

7 Over the years, HSA has raised awareness on the dangers of buying illegal health products from dubious sources through press releases, advisories and public education campaigns. The objective is to reduce the demand for such products. More information can be found at www.healthdangers.sg. HSA had also produced a video to educate consumers on the risks associated with buying health products online. This video can be viewed at https://youtu.be/dmjl_bSqJgA.

8 Aside from the period of intensified surveillance during Operation Pangea, HSA works with the local e-commerce websites and online forums to detect and remove posts that sell illegal health products. HSA also issues advisories to these sellers to inform them on health products that cannot be sold.

SALE AND SUPPLY OF ILLEGAL HEALTH PRODUCTS

9 HSA takes a serious view against those engaged in the sale and supply of illegal health products and will take strong enforcement action against such persons. Anyone who supplies illegal health products is liable to prosecution and if convicted, may be imprisoned for up to 3 years and/or fined up to \$100,000.

10 Members of the public who encounter illegal, counterfeit or other suspicious health products are encouraged to contact the Enforcement Branch of HSA at Tel: 68663485 or email: hsa_is@hsa.gov.sg.

OPERATION PANGEA

11 Operation Pangea is an international Internet week of action targeting the illegal online sale of counterfeit and unlicensed medicines. HSA was among 116 participating countries in this global Internet-based action coordinated by INTERPOL, the World Customs Organization (WCO), the Permanent Forum of International Pharmaceutical Crime (PFIPC), the Heads of Medicines Agencies Working Group of Enforcement Officers (HMA WGEO), the pharmaceutical industry and the electronic payments industry. The global operation targets the three main components of the illegal website trade and the people behind the illegal activity: the Internet infrastructure, the electronic payment system and the delivery service.

About the Health Sciences Authority (HSA)

The Health Sciences Authority (HSA) applies medical, pharmaceutical and scientific expertise through its three professional groups, Health Products Regulation, Blood Services and Applied Sciences, to protect and advance national health and safety. HSA is a multidisciplinary authority. It serves as the national regulator for health products, ensuring they are wisely regulated to meet standards of safety, quality and efficacy. As the national blood service, it is responsible for providing a safe and adequate blood supply. It also applies specialised scientific, forensic, investigative and analytical capabilities in serving the administration of justice. For more details, visit <http://www.hsa.gov.sg/>.

For more updates on public health and safety matters, follow us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/HSAsg.

About HSA's Health Products Regulation Group

The Health Products Regulation Group (HPRG) of HSA ensures that drugs, innovative therapeutics, medical devices and health-related products are wisely regulated and meet appropriate safety, quality and efficacy standards. It contributes to the development of biomedical sciences in Singapore by administering a robust, scientific and responsive regulatory framework.

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Photographs of the products

Modafinil



Mzac Bodyshape Jamu Tradisional



B Green Slimming Capsule



Go Lean Detox



24 Hrs Burn

