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Greek wholesalers claim a "counterfeit-free" pharma supply chain  
by Nick Smith at GIRP

ATHENS, June 8 (APM) - Greek wholesalers have guaranteed their national drugs supply chain is counterfeit-free as they fight against big pharma's direct-to-pharmacy delivery models.

Speaking as the hosts of the GIRP annual conference, vice-president of Greece's association of pharmaceutical wholesalers (PAPW) Irene Markaki, said there is "certainly no counterfeit medicine in Greece".

Markaki said she could say this with confidence because domestic security measures introduced by the government, which include "double bar-coding" and unique reference numbers, make the system immune to the introduction of counterfeit drugs.

Members of GIRP (European full-line pharmaceutical wholesalers) are fighting a battle against pharma taking fuller control of distribution by keeping ownership of drugs until they reach the pharmacy by using wholesalers as delivery agents - rather than the traditional model under which drugs are sold to the middle man.

While many believe pharma's real agenda in looking to take control of the supply chain is to end parallel trade, the battle is being fought on safety grounds, with companies saying they can reduce counterfeit drugs by taking out the middle man.

## MOTIVE

While Greece has historically been a target for parallel exporting, Markaki said pharma companies were targeting an extra profit margin.

"In Greece, the wholesaler profit is included in the price of the medicine."

A later speaker, president of Europe, Middle East and Africa for IMS Health, Adel Al-Saleh said pharma was looking to cut costs as it sought to maintain profit and this included distribution costs.

Wholesalers needed to find new ways to bring value to pharma, he added (full story to follow).

## PARALLEL TRADERS

However, Brian Ager director general of the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations (EFPIA) focused at the request of GIRP - in his later presentation - on the "common goal" of eliminating counterfeits from the supply chain.

While Ager did not outline a particular role for wholesalers in achieving the goal, he said the relatively simple and deployable technology of two-dimensional bar codes was likely to be used by European pharmaceutical companies following a Scandinavian pilot.

This would allow pharmacists to scan every pack of medicine dispensed and ensure that no packet with the same unique barcode had previously been dispensed.

Ager said he was disappointed that a ban on the re-packaging of medicines was unlikely to emerge from Brussels within the so-called pharma package.

Again many have suggested the motive behind this is the ending of parallel trade - such a ban would make the movement of medicines between EU countries very difficult.

However, Ager said the European Commission "recognised the value of package integrity" and EFPIA was looking to reinforce this.

In term of new security devices employed by pharmaceutical companies on drug packages, he said there should be "equivalent safety systems" for repackaging.

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