



# Fighting Fakes by Raising Public Awareness

[www.asop.eu](http://www.asop.eu)

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# Foreword

Domenico Di Giorgio

It is widely known among the experts in the field, that the sale of medicines online exposes the consumer to serious risks, as confirmed by recent cases.

The activities carried out in this field are based on two directions: the “counteracting” one, made through procedures aimed at the obscuring of websites, as result of constant web monitoring activities; and the “educational” one, examples of which are the different communication campaigns realised by single European countries.

In these initiatives, however, it has been neglected the importance of a single Europe-wide campaign, useful to convey consistent messages, shared at least among those countries characterised by the same legislative, regulatory and cultural framework.

Italy has willingly accepted ASOP’s proposal to collaborate on a pilot project (August 2015 - February 2016) based on an educational website and on Google AdWords tools, whose feedback will allow to lay the basis for a second stage in which other Member States will be involved, and thus achieve a shared communication campaign at the European level.

In this context, a useful support is offered by the network of both European and non-European Regulatory Agencies involved in “Fakeshare” ([www.fakeshare.eu](http://www.fakeshare.eu)), a European project co-funded by the EC (under the Prevention of and Fight against Crime – ISEC Programme) with the aim of coordinating prevention and counteracting initiatives against pharmaceutical crime, with a particular focus on the phenomenon of illegal online sales. The project also involves the Italian universities of Rome “Sapienza” and Trento, and associate partners such as enforcement authorities, professionals from industry, and IT experts.

The Fakeshare project has produced a number of progressive initiatives which have helped fight the criminals involved in the illegal selling of medicines via the internet. Part of this includes carrying out extensive market research to understand the buying behaviours and beliefs of those who use the internet to purchase medicines online. A key part of the Fakeshare project is also to produce communication tools and to raise public awareness of the fact that there is a growing market place for the illegal sales of medicines online. Any project, such as this one, will help to achieve this object and should be welcomed.

The fact that Google had granted an “Educational AdWords Grant” to ASOP EU to attract users to a “first search page” advertisement that would direct them to an educational website, gave added confidence for an effective educational online campaign.

If we address the “demand side” by changing behaviour through public awareness campaigns and thus prevent patients and consumers from potentially harming themselves is a key goal of the Fakeshare project. And this therefore has the potential to blunt this criminal activity as no demand means no market and thus fewer opportunities for the criminal.

Domenico Di Giorgio Ph.D  
Director of Products Quality & Counterfeiting Prevention Office



# Foreword

**Marco Pancini**

When the Alliance for Safe Online Pharmacy in the EU was formed in 2012, Google felt it important to be a Member and join a collaborative group of stakeholders that could make a real difference to the growing problem of the illegal sales of medicines over the internet.

Google at that time, as it is now, was also an active Board member of ASOP's sister organisation called the Center for Safe Internet Pharmacies (CSIP) constituted in the US. Last year CSIP published a very timely document for Internet intermediaries called **Principles of Participation** to address illegitimate online drug sellers as well as fundamentals of member involvement for these organisations namely: Advertising Service Providers, Registrars/Registries, Shipping Companies and Payment System Operators.

Google provides an educational AdWord grant to CSIP which has enabled an impactful consumer awareness campaign to be running for a number of years now. And since the inception of ASOP EU, Google has contributed to its project work and has hosted meetings in its Brussels and Dublin offices.

Clearly the leading edge "Counterfeiting the Counterfeiter" project of the EAASM enabled many consumers to become much more aware of the dangers of buying medicines online in Germany. Aligned to such educational initiatives, Google is also proactive in monitoring the World Wide Web for such criminal activity working closely with such private sector organisations as LegitScript. In addition, it has put in place a secure and thorough vetting mechanism for commercial organisations setting up advertising accounts that want to sell medicines online (the organisation has to provide proof it has a pharmacy licence etc). Set against this background, Google was keen to encourage further public awareness raising.

The Google AdWords grant provided to ASOP EU has enabled unwitting patients and consumers to be advised of the safety issues around buying medicines online. It has been most encouraging to see the number of people who have visited the educational website by clicking on the advertisement.

There is also clear evidence forming that the patient/consumer takes the advice that is being given which has to be a very good outcome. Patients who unwittingly take themselves outside of their national healthcare systems run risks that cannot easily be envisaged. Google is proud to be associated with this important initiative which ultimately will enhance the health of many people and help to save lives.

**Marco Pancini**  
Senior Policy Counsel  
Google Brussels



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# Executive Summary

## The rising threat

The burgeoning trade in falsified medicines is clearly evident in the statistical trends revealed by the many law enforcement agencies. The international Operation Pangea<sup>1</sup> week against falsified medicines coordinated by Interpol also indicates this strongly. Now in its 8th year, it highlights the dangers of buying medicines online. With 236 agencies participating in over 115 countries, in 2015 a record number of fake and illicit medicines were seized, including blood pressure medicines, erectile dysfunction pills, cancer medication and nutritional supplements.

The worldwide coordinated operations against criminals seeks to tackle the “supply side”. Equally important though, is to address the “demand side”. The education of the public is seen as a critical success factor<sup>2</sup>. **Indeed, to educate the unwitting patient/consumer to avoid buying medicines from illegal sellers of medicines via the internet, could be argued to be one of the most important actions, that society could take.**

## The Falsified Medicines Directive and the Common Logo

The European Union Falsified Medicines Directive 2011/62/EU (FMD)<sup>3</sup> with the announcement (February 2016) of the delegated regulations<sup>4</sup> of the safety features, represents a significant advance in making the legitimate pharmaceutical supply chain for prescription medicines even more secure. In summary, this means that every prescription pack of medicine in three year’s time will have a unique code on each pack. The pharmacist prior to dispensing the medicine will verify the medicine via a data matrix bar code.

The introduction of the Common Logo (part of the FMD) for legally operating online pharmacies/retailers in the EU Member States gave the Commission a legal basis

to establish the design of a common logo as well as the technical, electronic and cryptographic requirements for verification of its authenticity. It is however up to the Member States to determine the specific conditions for the retail supply of medicinal products to the public. Member States may impose certain conditions and limitations, e.g. by not allowing online sale of prescription medicines.



The illegal sale of medicinal products to the public via the Internet by retailers operating outside the law

is a serious danger, as falsified medicinal products may easily reach the public in this way. The logo (Italian one shown here) helps identify the websites which are operating legally. Buying from a legally operating pharmacy or retailer guarantees the safety of the products.<sup>5</sup> ASOP EU and the EAASM will continue to work with Member States to make the implementation of this initiative as successful as possible.

## NABP provides a secure top level domain name .pharmacy

Another way of addressing the safety and legitimacy of a website selling medicines has been developed by the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy (NABP)<sup>6</sup>. with an online naming convention that enables only qualified online sellers to use the suffix dot pharmacy (.pharmacy) in their website address. In this way, the mark of assurance is built into the website address, making the website’s legitimacy readily apparent to consumers. Implementation of the programme is now well under way and with its vision to be introduced worldwide, the .pharmacy domain promises to be a powerful way to protect patients and make the internet a safer place to buy medicines.

## The Italian AdWords campaign with educational website

Against this background, the “Fighting Fakes by Raising Public Awareness” project was designed to accurately and directly target and warn people tempted to purchase prescription medicines online, more often than not, without a prescription from their doctor.

The educational website aptly named “Medicineperte – medicines now” provides all of the information to educate people going online to buy prescription medicines. Supported by a Google AdWord grant, keywords such as “pharmacy online” were bought and this triggered the ASOP EU advertisement to appear on the first Google search page, encouraging browsers to visit the educational website. Over a 6 month period, (September 2015 to February 2016) this pilot project on average, achieved over 13,600 first page impressions per day.

With a “click through” rate of nearly 2% this extrapolates to nearly 100,000 people in one year being exposed to the educational website. With an average dwell time of more than one minute on the website with many visits recorded of far greater length, the longest being 29 minutes, these statistics give a developing picture that such educational vehicles are effective.

## Convincing results that raising awareness can change behaviours

Of particular importance was being able to measure if the visitors would change their behaviour having been exposed to the content on the educational website. This vital information was made possible by a short questionnaire implanted on each website page. Visitors were asked to answer just 5 questions. One critical question was “Having visited this educational website, has it changed your motivation to buy medicines online and obtain your medicines from your local pharmacy?” To this question, although numbers are small and should be regarded as preliminary results (59 responders) then, there is a clear and growing trend that people, once they are made aware of the dangers, will change their behaviours and revert to going to their pharmacy.

This report demonstrates the significant impact that an AdWord campaign can achieve. The ASOP EU and EAASM organisations would like to extend the reach of such a powerful educational tool to other European countries. This will undoubtedly add greatly to raising public awareness and enhance patient safety and ultimately support health outcomes across the European landscape.

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# Glossary

Term	Description
<b>Click Through Rate</b>	When a visitor clicks on the advertisement as a percentage of the number of first page impressions.
<b>Dwell Time</b>	The actual length of time that a visitor spends on a website page
<b>Falsified Medicines</b>	Falsified medicines are fake medicines that pass themselves off as real, authorised medicines. Falsified medicines might contain ingredients, including active ingredients, which are of bad quality or in the wrong dose – either too high or too low. As they have not been properly evaluated to check their quality, safety and efficacy - as required by strict EU authorisation procedures - this could be detrimental to health. Falsified medicines are a major threat to public health (the term ‘falsified’ refers to all forms of falsification, while the term ‘counterfeit’ specifically refers to an infringement to intellectual property rights). As falsifications become more sophisticated, the risk of falsified medicines reaching patients in the EU increases every year.
<b>Google AdWords</b>	Google AdWords is Google’s online advertising programme. Through AdWords, you can create online ads to reach people exactly when they’re interested in the products and services that you offer.
<b>Google AdWord Campaign</b>	A digital campaign based on visitors searching with key words in their search engine bar. The aim is to have the advertisement appear at the top of the first search page. The visitor then has the opportunity to click on the advertisement which navigates through to a website.
<b>Google AdWord Grant</b>	An educational grant given by Google to enable AdWords to be bought.
<b>Impression</b>	This is when the Google AdWord appears on a search page and is triggered by the visitor keying in a search term, such as Pharmacy Online.
<b>Key words</b>	Words or phrases describing your product or service that you choose to help determine when and where your ad can appear.
<b>Reach</b>	Reach is an estimate of the number of users within a selected location target. You can use the provided reach numbers to get a rough idea of how many users your AdWords ads could reach within a geographic area.
<b>URL</b>	A Uniform Resource Locator (URL), is commonly termed a web address that specifies its location on a computer network and a mechanism for retrieving it. Most web browsers display the URL of a web page above the page in an address bar.



# Introduction

## Organisations collaborating to enhance patient safety

The EAASM is an inclusive a not for profit pan-European patient safety organisation with an established record of achievement in the area of combating falsified medicines. The EAASM aims to:

- ★ Raise public awareness of the dangers of falsified medicines
- ★ Campaign for improved legislation
- ★ Enforce patient's rights to safe medicines
- ★ Input into existing anti-counterfeiting initiatives where appropriate

Originally set up as a major project within the EAASM, the Alliance for Safe Online Pharmacy in the EU (ASOP EU), is a not for profit Community Interest Company (CIC) with a mission to “make the internet a safer place to buy medicines (where it is legal to do so)”.

Since its inception as a CIC in February 2014 it has a growing number of Members and Observers.

ASOP EU has a Memorandum of

**ASOP** | ALLIANCE FOR SAFE  
GLOBAL | ONLINE PHARMACIES

Understanding with its global-reach sister company, the Alliance for Safe Online Pharmacies (ASOP) which is constituted in the US. ASOP Global provides stakeholders a unified voice to engage in advocacy, education and outreach to:

- ★ Educate patients and caregivers
- ★ Engage relevant governmental administrative agencies and enforcement authorities
- ★ Raise awareness with policymakers
- ★ Develop credible data and information
- ★ Educate health care providers
- ★ Raise awareness about the role

Internet commerce stakeholders e.g. Internet service providers, search engines, domain name registrars, financial transaction entities, and other entities could play in protecting patient safety.

ASOP EU and ASOP Global collaborates closely with the Center for Safe Internet Pharmacies (CSIP) which is a not for profit organisation founded in 2011 by a diverse group of Internet industry leaders to address the global problem of consumer access to illegitimate pharmaceuticals from illegal online pharmacies and other sources.



CSIP, its 12 member organisations and partners in the industry provide consumers and medical professionals with ways to verify online pharmacies, to

report illegal online pharmacies or falsified medicines, and to become educated about these issues. CSIP also collaborates with global law enforcement in support of efforts to end the threat of illegal online pharmacies.

It is worthy to note that there are a number of other organisations who work to raise awareness about the threat of falsified medicines and this criminal activity. Such activity is to be commended and each organisation provides useful information that is well worth reading.



## Falsified medicines: a growing global threat

Falsified medicines are potentially lethal<sup>1</sup>. They may contain no active ingredient, the wrong ingredient or too much ingredient. They may also contain toxic and/or other ingredients such as road paint, floor wax, shoe polish, talcum powder or chalk.

Judging by the many law enforcement initiatives that happen across the world and notably the PANGEA operations, it can clearly be seen that the extent of criminal activity is on the increase.

The most recent PANGEA VIII which took place in June 2015 and involved 115 countries, targeted the criminal networks behind the illegal trade in medicines and medical devices. This resulted in 156 arrests worldwide and the seizure of illegally traded medicines estimated to be worth many tens of millions of euros.

This was the largest ever Internet-based operation focusing on the illicit sale of medicines and medical devices via the Internet. The participants were 236 agencies involving police, customs and health regulatory authorities. Private

partners from the Internet and payment industries also supported the operation, which saw a record number of illicit and falsified medicines seized – which amounted to more than twice the amount confiscated during the 2013 operation. The action resulted in the launch of 429 investigations, the suspension of 550 online adverts for illicit pharmaceuticals and 2,414 websites taken offline.

It is estimated that, at any given moment, there are over 30,000 illegally operating websites selling medicines aimed at the European population<sup>2</sup>. This poses a real risk and has the potential to severely harm the health of patients and consumers alike.

## Demand side motivations and behaviours

The expectations of the public is that the internet offers a convenient and essential portal in to the areas of knowledge, news, services and products. This trend can only continue as the bounds of new social media helps fuel an insatiable desire to stay ever more in touch with whatever the individual decides to take an interest in, or indeed wants to buy.

This is no less true for those buying medicines online. A study by the research company HappyCurious sponsored by Sanofi<sup>3</sup> conducted in 5 major European countries (France, Germany, Italy, Spain, UK) revealed the reasons for buying online and enabled a statistically robust estimation of the volume of the phenomena.

### As to the reasons for buying online they were:

1. To Save money - 62%
2. Medicines not available in my country - 41%
3. To buy medicines discretely /anonymously - 27%
4. To save time - 21%

**In respect of the number of people buying online, the average was estimated to be 18% (with great variation between the 5 countries). Taking 18% of the European population then that equates to a staggering 130 million people who are potentially buying medicines online.**

Is it possible to change behaviour? A study conducted by the University of Rome under Professor Barbaranelli<sup>4</sup> in the Fakeshare framework, encompassing three countries (Italy, Portugal and Spain) revealed that behaviours could indeed be modified by education.

### The key findings were as follows:

1. Awareness was too low and must be increased
2. Purchasing medicines online is a behaviour mainly guided by rational beliefs that can be changed, not by impulsive tendencies that are largely irrational
3. Approval of others, attitude and perception of safety are the most important variables in explaining online purchases
4. Communicating that medicines purchased online can be dangerous for health may lower the perception that this behaviour is safe
5. Communication campaigns must capitalise on the fact that certain people will influence the perception of buyers of medicines and can be identified as those who are trustworthy. More work is needed in this area to more clearly identify who this influential group might be. And assessing the influence of groups such as doctors and pharmacists in the role they could play, will be important as these groups should be regarded as fundamental vectors for influencing future purchasing behaviours.

**Preliminary results from the “Fighting Fakes by Raising Public Awareness” pilot project, admittedly based on small numbers (59 participants) reveals that, many of those who visited the website and completed a survey, stated that the knowledge gained of buying medicines online would make them consider changing their behaviour.**

This clearly indicates the need to inform the public about the existence of such illegal websites selling medicines which may cause harm and are a threat to a patient’s safety.

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3. European and Counterfeit Medicines – Opinion Survey HappyCurious for Sanofi [http://en.sanofi.com/Images/36553\\_2014-05\\_15\\_Counterfeit\\_medicines\\_EN.pdf](http://en.sanofi.com/Images/36553_2014-05_15_Counterfeit_medicines_EN.pdf)
4. Professor C Barbaranelli. Presentation of results from Fakeshare 1 survey: Profiles and characteristics of online consumers. University of Rome April 2015 <http://www.fakeshare.eu/it/events/italian-international-conference>

## The vision to raise public awareness across the EU

In 2011, over a nine week period the EAASM ran a highly successful educational patient/consumer campaign entitled “Counterfeiting the Counterfeiter” in Germany. This campaign was designed to engage directly with potential purchasers of falsified medicines. It achieved this by developing a website that replicated a typical apparently trustworthy but actually illegal online pharmacy. Instead of falsified medicines, the online pharmacy dispensed safety advice and redirected visitors to legitimate online or high street pharmacies.

Its primary aim was to divert potential purchasers and to provide warning information and links to legitimate sources of medicine. Via Google AdWords “Pay per Click” using relevant keywords, email advertising and banner advertisements, potential purchasers were attracted to the educational website. The campaign was regarded as ground breaking and proved that digital campaigns can directly influence human behaviour to the good.

Based on this positive experience the EAASM, in close collaboration with ASOP EU, embarked on designing an educational website to benefit those Italians who were searching online to potentially purchase medicines.

This report sets out to describe the learnings and experiences of how a successful digital advertisement campaign can reach specific audiences who are involved in, or intending to buy, medicines online. In this project one country was targeted, notably Italy which at the time did not allow any sales of medicines via the internet and so it would offer the opportunity to benchmark such an environment and provide useful pointers for future campaigns, as well as directly informing the Italian patient/consumer. Please note that In Italy the sales of OTC medicines are now allowed to be sold over the internet to comply with the Falsified Medicines Directive.

By choosing carefully key words (essentially the popular words being inputted by would-be buyers of medicines online to the Google search engine menu bar) this gave rise to the ASOP EU advertisement appearing on the majority of first page Google search pages.

In Google terms then such an “appearance” is described as an “impression”. The campaign has achieved over 13,600 impressions per day, leading to 272 click throughs per day to the EAASM educational website. These statistics demonstrate this Google AdWords campaign is an effective and powerful way of reaching an online specific segment of society choosing to use the internet in this way.

This performance echoes that of the CSIP educational campaign who was awarded a Google Adwords grant in March 2013. To date, there have been over 32.7 million impressions and 486,000 conversions. As such, their click through rate is above average at 1.86%. The page most visited is the consumer resource section, specifically the online pharmacy verification tool offered by LegitScript. The specific webpage has received upwards of 600,000 clicks.

**It is the vision of EAASM (who created the educational website) and ASOP EU (who have been granted the Google AdWord educational grant), to extend the educational campaign to other European countries. There is the opportunity to realise a pan-European campaign that will have a significant positive impact on patient safety and ultimately impact greatly on people’s long term health and well being and ultimately save lives.**

**The EU by definition, is a single market.**

# Fighting Fakes by Raising Public Awareness

## The Google AdWords Campaign

In June 2015 following a submission to Google, ASOP EU was granted an AdWords grant for a period of 1 year. This grant enabled ASOP EU to “buy” key words that mimic the words that “would be” buyers of medicines would key-in to the search bar to find websites selling medicines.

It is important to note that Google’s policy around buying AdWords that relate to healthcare (e.g. pharmacy, medicine, etc) is very strict. Any such search keywords have to be approved and evidence provided as to the organisation’s credentials (pharmacy licence etc).

## Campaign objectives

The overarching aims of the project were to:

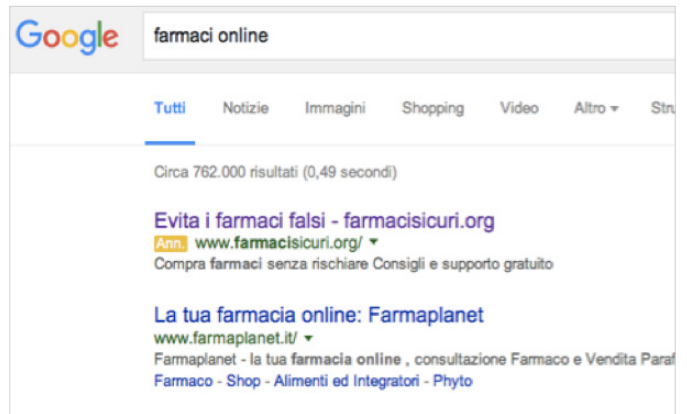
- ★ Raise public awareness about the dangers of illegally operating websites selling medicines
- ★ Protect and educate patients/consumers
- ★ Direct patients to safe and legitimate sources of medicines
- ★ To understand the key motivations as to why people buy online and to assess whether educational campaigns can change perceptions and behaviours

The AdWords campaign went live on Sunday 30th August 2015. And since that time to end February 2016 the number of impressions has exceeded 2.5 million.

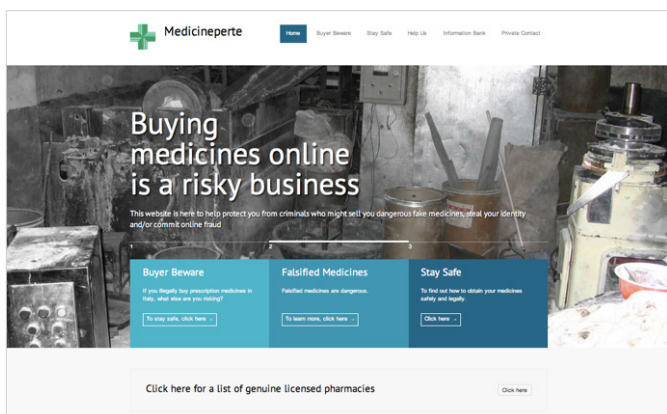
## Website click through flow



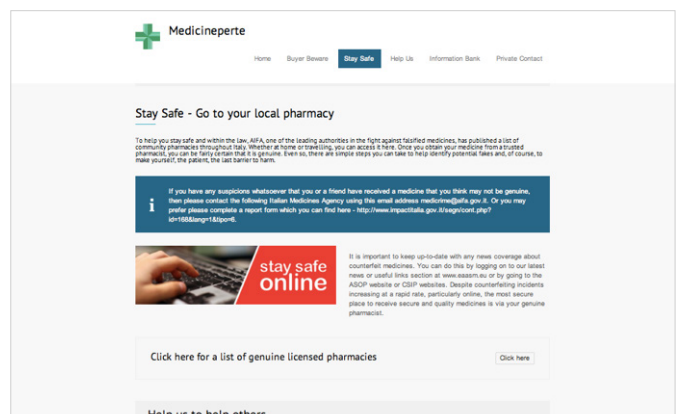
### 1. Google Search



### 2. Search results



### 3. The educational website landing page



### 4. Educational website information page

# Website slides - English version

## 1. First Time Landing Page

## 2. Buyer Beware

## 3. Stay safe - Go to your local pharmacy

## 4. Help Us To Help Others - Survey

## 5. Information Bank

# Results

Once a Google AdWords campaign is opened this gives access to a wealth of useful “visitor” data derived from the Google dashboard and analytics tools. The critical information can be summarised as follows:

1. Number of “impressions” when the advertisement appears on the first Google search results page
2. The number of people who then click on the advertisement (the click through rate) which then exposes them to the educational website
3. The time spent on the educational website
4. The completion of the survey online which is posted on each page of the educational website

## Number of impressions

Taking each of these in turn, the number of impressions is now averaging over 13,600 per day. **Over a year there would be approaching 5 million opportunities for the advertisement to be seen and clicked on by a searcher for medicines online.**

## Click through rate

In terms of click through rate (CTR) the average for the 6 months campaign period is approaching 2%. This is a higher CTR versus the average Google AdWord account CTR.

**Extrapolating this to a one year time period, then this would mean that nearly 100,000 visitors would click on the advertisement and be exposed to the educational message “Buying Medicines online is a risky business”.**

## Dwell time spent on the website

The average time spent on the website was 1 minute 25 seconds with over 211 visitors spending on average 12 minutes 20 seconds. The longest recorded time spent on the website was 29 minutes 2 seconds.

## Key statistics

- ★ **6 months activity from 30th August 2015 to 29th February 2016**
- ★ **Over 13,600 impressions on first search page per day**
- ★ **Greater than 2% click through rates for certain periods**
- ★ **The average time spent on the educational website was 1 minute 25 seconds with 211 visitors spending on average 12 minutes 20 seconds**
- ★ **The live online survey preliminary results revealed that the vast majority of visitors who completed the survey would now at least consider buying their medicines from their local pharmacy**

## Visitors from 9 countries

Although the clear majority of viewers of the website were from Italy, visits were recorded from 8 other countries namely (in ascending order of number of visits): United States, United Kingdom, Russia, China, Germany, Netherlands, France, Belgium. This illustrates the cross border intent by potential purchasers and highlights the global nature of the trade in medicines online.

## Live online survey

On each page of the educational website is the opportunity to complete a survey of 5 questions. To date up to the end of February 2016, preliminary results from 59 people have been recorded. This represents a rich seam of growing contemporary information and most importantly acts as a gauge of whether the website has the capability to change behaviour.

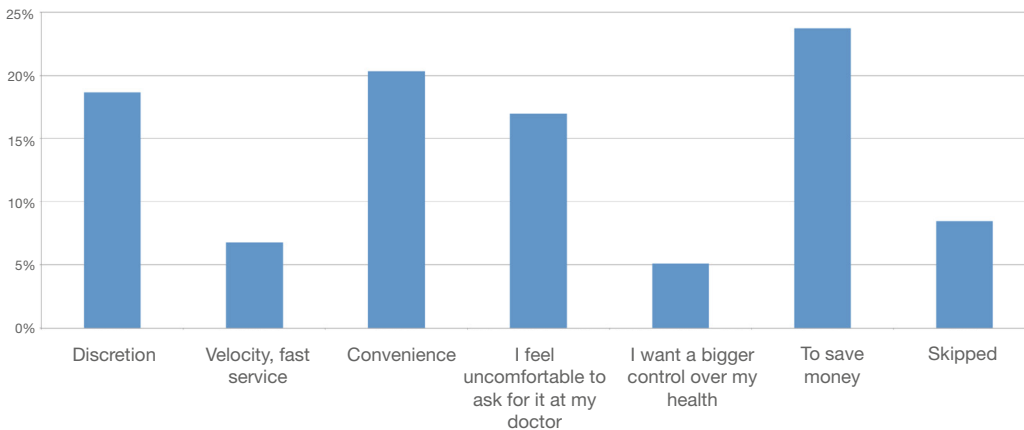
You will recall that the work carried out by Professor Barbaranelli at the University of Roma revealed that **“Purchasing medicines online is a behaviour mainly guided by rational beliefs that can be changed, not by impulsive tendencies that are largely irrational.”**

### Question 1 - Please let us know what medicines you are wanting to buy via an online pharmacy?

Various explanations were given that revealed people were trying to buy medicines for: allergy, analgesia/anti-inflammatory, arthritis, bunnions, cognitive enhancement, coughs and colds, cosmetics, depression (anxiolytics), erectile dysfunction, food supplements, Hepatitis C, herbal medicine, hygiene, high omega oil, prostate enlargement, medicines otherwise bought at a pharmacy to save money.

### Question 2 - Please let us know the reasons why you have chosen to buy your medicines online?

The answers in ascending order relate to “saving money”, “convenience”, “discretion”, “uncomfortable to ask doctor”, “fast service”, “more control over my health”.

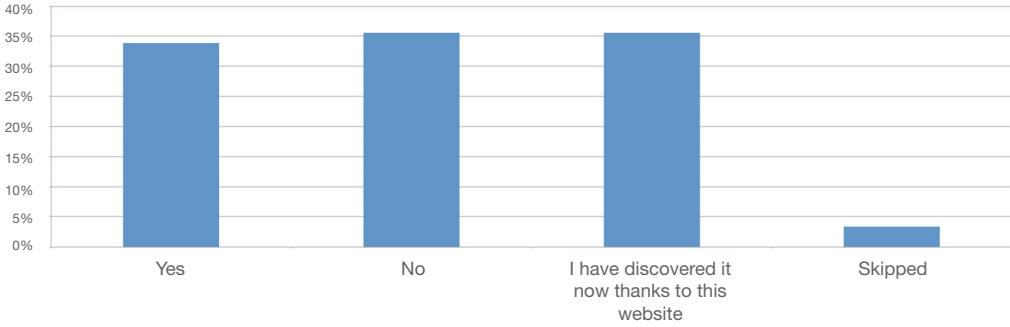


### Question 3 - Are you aware that the websites you are visiting are most likely operating illegally?

It is important to note that 34% of respondents state that they are aware that the websites are likely to be operating illegally. However 36% said that they were not aware and a further 36% said that this website had informed them about this illegal activity. Indicating that overall it might be assumed that a high percentage (72%) of the viewers of the website were not originally aware of the fact that websites being visited were operating illegally. Please note that due to 5 respondents ticking more than one answer, the cumulative percentages add to more than 100%.

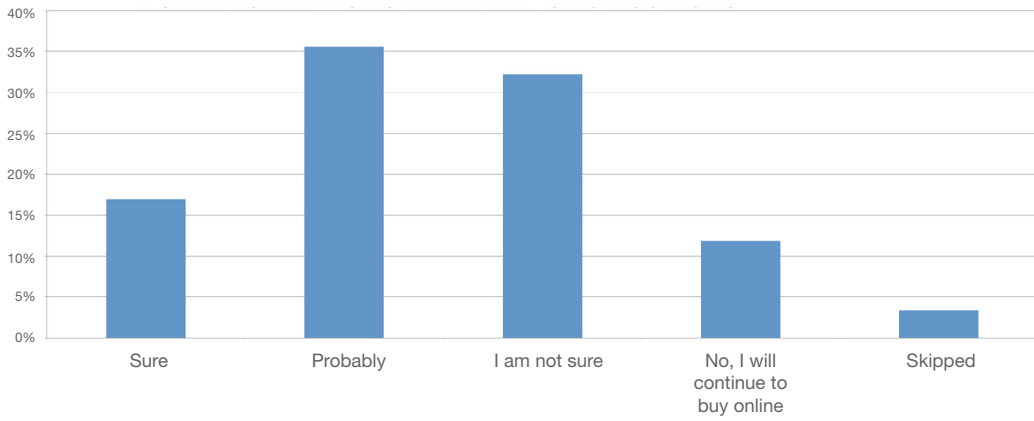


### Question 3 - Chart



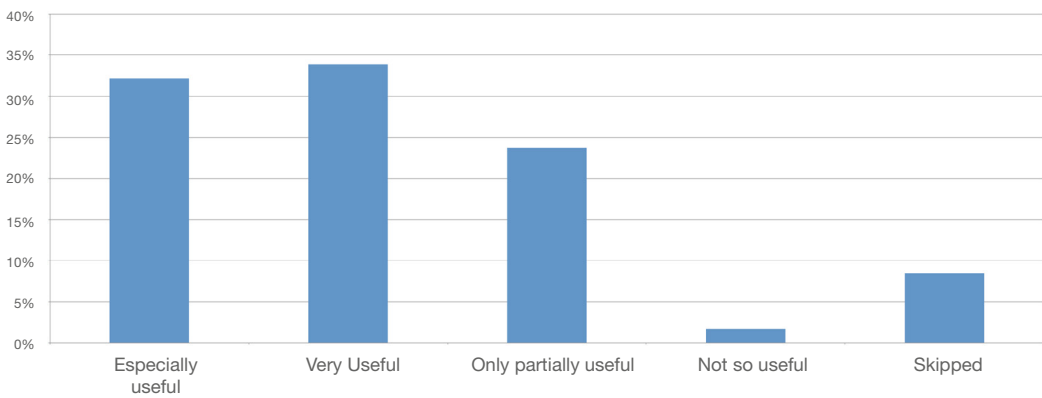
### Question 4 - Having visited this educational website, has it changed your motivation to buy your medicines online and obtain your medicines from your local pharmacy?

52% of the respondents say that they are “sure” or “probably” to this question with 32% saying that they are “unsure” with 12% saying that “No I will continue to buy online”



### Question 5 - How would you rate the content of this educational website?

It is encouraging to receive positive feedback about the educational impact of the website with 66% of respondents saying that they found the material “especially useful” or “very useful”. A further 24% felt it “only partially useful” with 2% “not so useful”



# Conclusions and recommendations

## Behaviours can be changed

The “Fighting Fakes by Raising Public Awareness” campaign was created to prove that the unsuspecting or indeed the knowing patient/consumer could be engaged to enter in to an informative educational website to learn more about falsified medicines. And the dangers therein.

The fact that over 13,600 impressions per day were recorded, has told us that a well targeted campaign using the correct keywords can reach this target audience.

That the click through rate was at least 1% and indeed higher at times, says that a Google digital advertisement has power to attract visitors along an informative path that can ultimately be highly beneficial in terms of changing behaviour.

## Why can we say this?

Firstly, we know those visitors who explore the educational website are spending on average nearly one and a half minutes viewing the content. Secondly we have gained a much better understanding of whether people are willing to change their behaviours. This can be regarded as a crucial finding. **The vast majority of those completing the online survey said that they would consider changing their behaviour and go to a local pharmacy. And, although this question was not asked, one might assume that they would also visit an authorised/legal website selling medicines at a distance. This is very encouraging news indeed. Admittedly there is a small number of responders to the survey so far but as survey responses increase, given their uniformity, it is a very encouraging finding.**

Taking a step back for a moment and thinking of the overall impact. If the campaign is exposing over 13,600 online purchasers on a daily basis then that equates to nearly 5 million opportunities to see in one year. A click through rate of 2% means that there is the opportunity to influence approximately 100,000 potential online purchasers of medicines. And this is in a country - Italy, that during the study period did not allow medicines to be bought over the internet.

## Recommendations

It is a key objective of ASOP EU, the EAASM and other closely aligned not for profit patient safety organisations to raise public awareness and tackle the “demand” side of purchasing medicines online. A number of research projects have revealed that the public is under-educated in this area and so there is a pressing need.

“Fighting Fakes by Raising Public Awareness” campaign has proved such campaigns have the power to achieve tackling the “demand” side created by this patient/consumer behaviour. Without the support and commitment of Google and the adgrant then this could not be achieved, as not for profit organisations could never be funded enough to realise truly effective ongoing campaigns that we have seen here with this Italian educational campaign.

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[www.asop.eu](http://www.asop.eu)

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