

Chain Drug Review

August 20, 2007

Drug imports pose substantial risks.

(ANNUAL REPORT OF RETAIL PHARMACY: BRANDED DRUGS)(Survey)

WASHINGTON -- Significant numbers of Americans are buying drugs from foreign countries, often via the Internet, according to a recent study.

Antibiotics and pain relievers are the most common medications purchased in this way, according to the consumer survey, which also found that half of the respondents who are buying drugs from another country are doing so because they lack a doctor's prescription.

Saving money is not always a motivating factor: 20% of the consumers importing drugs have incomes of more than \$100,000 a year, and 85% have insurance with prescription drug coverage.

The survey was sponsored by the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA), the Partnership for a Drug-Free America, the Center for Pharmacoeconomic Studies at the University of Texas College of Pharmacy and the Men's Health Network.

"This study further confirms what the Food and Drug Administration has been saying all along--millions of Americans are circumventing the system and going to other sources to buy their medicine because they do not have a doctor's prescription for the medicine they want," says PhRMA president and chief executive officer Billy Tauzin. "Alarming, this behavior increases an individual's risk of being exposed to dangerous counterfeit medicines."

Another source of worry was the fact that people under age 35 were most likely to be drug importers. "We are very concerned about the availability and use of medications without a doctor's prescription," says Scan Clark, executive vice president of the Partnership for a Drug-Free America. "Internet savvy teens know it is as easy to obtain an abusable prescription drug from a rogue online pharmacy as it is to go shopping or download a song. Parents need to educate themselves about this behavior and communicate the risks to their children."

Adds Marv Shephard, director of the Center for Pharmacoeconomic Studies at the University of Texas: "The study disputes popular belief that Americans mainly purchase lifestyle drugs from foreign countries. In fact, the majority of drugs purchased are to treat chronic ailments. What is troubling is that many drugs are purchased without a prescription, which may mean patients are not under the care of a licensed health care provider."