

Government deeply concerned about suspected online resale of public hospital patients' medicines

The Government yesterday (August 13) expressed grave concern over the suspected resale of public hospital patients' medicines on an online platform and will deal with the incident seriously. The Government reiterated that the Department of Health (DH) has an established mechanism to monitor the sale of health and pharmaceutical products in the Hong Kong market, including those through the Internet. The DH is liaising with the Hospital Authority to seriously investigate into the alleged case and shall take prompt enforcement action as appropriate.

According to the preliminary understanding, the incident involved a pharmaceutical product, Lactulose. It does not contain any substance listed in the Poisons List of the Pharmacy and Poisons Regulations (Cap. 138A) and is a type of "non-poison" medicine which does not require a prescription nor under the supervision of pharmacist for sale.

According to the Pharmacy and Poisons Ordinance (Cap. 138) (the Ordinance), any products falling within the definition of "pharmaceutical products" must satisfy the criteria of safety, efficacy and quality, and must be registered with the Pharmacy and Poisons Board of Hong Kong before they can be sold or distributed in Hong Kong. If a product fails to compile with relevant statutory requirements (such as being unregistered, or found to have quality defects or adulterated with harmful substances), the DH will investigate and make public announcement as soon as possible to safeguard public health. In addition, if the concerned medicines are also classified as Part 1 poisons under the Ordinance, the medicines should only be sold by pharmacies and under the supervision of registered pharmacists. Illegal sale or possession of unregistered pharmaceutical products or Part 1 poisons are criminal offences under the Ordinance, which upon conviction, are subject to a penalty of a fine up to HK\$100,000 and an imprisonment of two years.

If the DH detects any suspected illegal sale or possession of pharmaceutical products, the DH will promptly investigate, and, if necessary, conduct joint operations with other law enforcement agencies, and any irregularities so found will be dealt with in accordance with the law. For this specific case, the DH will investigate along the line of illegal sale of unregistered pharmaceutical products. In the past five years (from 2020 to June 2024), the Drug Office of the DH handled 209 conviction cases involving illegal sale or possession of unregistered pharmaceutical products or Part 1 poisons, with the highest penalty of an imprisonment of 10 months or a fine of up to HK\$100,000.

â€‹The DH has been reminding the public, through publicity and education including various online materials such as "[General Knowledge on the Use of Medicines](#)" and "[Be Cautious when Buying Medicines on Internet](#)", to refrain

from purchasing or using products with unknown or dubious ingredients, or from unknown sources, for protection of public health.