



## Medicines & Healthcare products Regulatory Agency

### Board Meeting

### Falsified Medicines and Medical Devices Campaign

22 October 2018

**Issue/ Purpose:**

To update the Agency Board on the progress of the Agency's FakeMeds campaign and plans for future activity

**Summary:**

Since the last update to Agency Board, the focus on slimming pills has continued, with additional activity focused on sports supplements sold as medicines, dental equipment and erectile dysfunction medication.

All objectives have been achieved and exceeded meaning that the campaign has succeeded in creating behaviour change in our target audience and reduced the prevalence of consumers purchasing fake slimming pills sold online, thus having a positive impact on public health.

Success has been achieved through creating relevant case studies and meaningful partnerships with organisations that have helped to develop further engaging content; generating significant media coverage in a broad range of outlets and through social media marketing of to maximise audience engagement with campaign messages.

The campaign has received industry recognition through the award of Best Healthcare campaign in 2018 and a Mark of Excellence in the Public Sector campaign category from the Chartered Institute of Public Relations. It has also been shortlisted for three additional awards from PRCA and the Government Communications Service, which recognises excellence in public sector communications campaigns.

Plans for the next stage (phase 2) of the campaign, which focuses on Sexually Transmitted Infection self-test kits, have now been developed, with activity set to launch in October 2018 and run until May 2019.

**Resource implications:**

The agreed budget for delivery of phase 2 of the campaign is £30,000.

**EU Referendum implications:**

During phase 1 of the campaign (2016/17), the initial impact of the EU Referendum result caused a change in approach to campaign delivery and spend in line with other Government departments' public-facing communications work and campaign messaging.

During phase 2, the longevity of our messaging could be impacted by potential changes to European Safety Markers for Devices, such as the CE mark. Future phases of the campaign focused on medicines could be impacted by withdrawal from the EU Common Logo and registry for authorised online sellers of medicines.

**Timings:**

Phase 2 (STI self-test kits) to launch week commencing 15<sup>th</sup> October and will run with activity peaks until May 2019

Phase 3 to launch May 2019 (exact timings subject to further developments)

**Action required by Board:**

To note the progress made against the campaign objectives to date, and the plans for delivering the phase 2 in 2018/19.

**Author(s):**

Lucy Cooke, Campaigns Lead

**Which of the five themes in the Corporate Plan 2013/2018 does the paper support?**

Theme 4 – Secure global supply chains

4(vii)

**If relevant, which Business Plan strategic activity does it support?**

4(xi)

**CET Sponsor:**

Rachel Bosworth, Director of Communications

## **1. Background to the Agency's falsified medicines and medical devices campaign**

The Agency's falsified medicines and medical devices campaign aims to reduce the harm caused to public health by changing consumer behaviour when purchasing medical products online. In June 2016, CET agreed the formalised campaign plans for phase one (2016/17) and the outline approach for subsequent phases. The long-term campaign, launched in August 2016, aims to change the behaviour of specific target audiences.

The campaign approach was tested in a pilot phase where the product focus was slimming pills. Results have shown our strategy to be successful in delivering impact against agreed objectives. UK-wide public-facing communications activity is run in a series of phases to promote key messages using a variety of channels and activities.

Each campaign phase features:

- **prioritised medical product(s)** that is mentioned throughout the phase
- **a series of medical products, from the approved shortlist**, that are mentioned in communications for a limited duration – for example connected to days / weeks of action and social / seasonal trends
- **overarching messaging** and advice on how to buy products safely.

The overarching objective for the campaign across its duration is:

- to reduce target audience consumer intention and likelihood to purchase potentially falsified medicines or medical devices online through illegitimate sources by 25%, thereby reducing the harm these products cause to public health

The objectives for phase 1 of the campaign were:

1. **Behaviour change:** educate target audience consumers to avoid falsified medical products online through an increase in use of legitimate source verification methods.
  - a. 14,563 extra users of the EU logo website every month (20% increase)
  - b. 32,444 extra searches of the EU logo registry a month (15% increase)
2. **Communications:** reach 2,568,990 (25%) of target audience (18-30-year-olds) through integrated communications
  - a. ensure 50% of campaign media coverage includes key messages
  - b. ensure 65% of media coverage is favourable

## 2. Campaign phase 1 activity and tactics

Our primary audience for slimming pills – 18-30 year-olds - is confident and internet savvy, and therefore may be lulled into a false sense of security when purchasing medical products online because of their belief in their ability to identify rogue websites generally. They have immense trust in the internet, in known-brands and in their own ability to identify and avoid dodgy products.

Significant qualitative insight carried out with our target audience taught us that interrupting a purchasing journey could reduce the likelihood of consumers buying fake medical products. Therefore, encouraging the audience to check the MHRA register of legitimate online retailers of medicine could reduce the public health impact of fake medical products.

We determined that content and channel selection should reflect that the buying of fake medical products was happening online. Therefore, our strategy became to engage the target audience and create a clear campaign identity by:

- using integrated, targeted communications
- making side effects seem more immediate and relevant
- establishing a clear brand and consistent messaging.

We created partnerships with relevant stakeholders to identify case-studies describing real-life side effects and the scale of the issue. We worked with Slimming World and gained valuable quantitative insight from their membership to generate media coverage and broaden the campaign reach to an extended target audience.

We developed relationships with audience influencers including established vloggers and medical professionals, whose backing gave additional credibility to our campaign and increased our target audience relevance.

We developed innovative animations, created in-house, to encourage audience identification with content, using humour to communicate serious health consequences in order to interrupt consumer behaviour. Animations were included in

media information packs, resulting in increased interview requests and use of our content across media channels.

We used targeted social media marketing on a range of platforms to improve access to target audience, enabling engagement and information for evaluation.

We linked dodgy slimming pills and their side-effects to communication channels that were used by our target audience. For example:

- Securing a main storyline in BBC's prime-time Casualty TV show (4.09 million overnight viewers) and radio coverage across 10+ stations (BBC Radio 1 etc.)
- Relevant magazine coverage such as Reveal and Closer in addition 60+ articles in print and online news (Mail Online, Guardian, BBC etc.),
- Website coverage, vloggers and social media marketing of animations.

We linked STI kits activity to social trends including Valentine's Day. In-house animations were created and supported by social media marketing. To engage older influencers of the target audience, we featured in ITV Tonight (January 2018), discussing the dangers of fakes.

To test content on Erectile Dysfunction, the agreed priority product for phase 3 of the campaign, we featured in a TV news story and 1-2-1 interview via Facebook live with Sky News on the dangers of fakes (November 2017). Our expert showed the audience seized medical products and the unhygienic conditions in which they were found.

For Christmas 2017, we created 10 animations covering all campaign medical products and messaging. They featured favourite Christmas songs with a twist, such as "It's beginning to look a lot like Syphilis". The animations were supported by social media marketing.

Although the bulk of activity was focused between September 2017 and February 2018, additional media opportunities for March – July were developed including:

- *Muscle and Fitness* magazine article
- *Bella* Magazine article
- *Undercover: Nailing the Fraudsters* documentary on Channel 5
- *Sibutramine* documentary on BBC3

Budget was also used to promote existing animations across social media, engaging the audience with our 'don't risk it in the run up to summer' messaging. £1,400 was split evenly across an eight-week period in May and June. This generated an additional 150,000 impressions of our content from our target audience.

### **3. Campaign phase 1 expenditure**

The total cost of campaign delivery was £7,000. This ensured social media marketing of campaign content, targeting messaging towards carefully segmented target audience groups across Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

### **4. Impact of campaign phase 1 activity**

External quarterly media evaluation demonstrates that the campaign has performed well against the set objectives.

**Output for objective 1:**

Data from 30 November to 30 January 2018 reports a 19.8% increase or **28,823** additional users of the EU logo website (viewing of the EU logo). This missed the objective by 0.2% or 303 visits.

Data from 30 November to 30 January 2018 reports use of the EU logo registry increased by 16% or **68,101**. This exceeded the objectives by 1% or 2,524 searches.

**Output for objective 2:**

External data up to December 2017 reports that we have reached **55% (5,651,778)** of our target audience (18-30-year-olds). This **exceeded** the objectives by an additional **30%** (3,082,788) 18-30-year-olds.

**Output for objective 2a:**

External data up to December 2017 reports that **61%** of media coverage featured key messages. This **exceeded** the objectives by an additional 11%.

**Output for objective 2b:**

External data up to December 2017 reports that **80%** of content was favourable, 7% strongly so. This **exceeded** the objectives by an additional 15%

**Value for Money / ROI**

The cost of the campaign (£31) equates to 0.005p per target audience member reached.

It is difficult to evaluate whether the campaign and actions have prevented a side effect for each person reached. The societal cost of care for a stroke, one of the side effects of dodgy slimming pills, is £45,409 in the first 12 months plus £24,778 in subsequent years. This shows that every £1 invested in the campaign creates a return on investment to society of £125.

**Evaluation summary**

In addition to the above, interest in the campaign has snowballed - developing organic engagement and relationships with new relevant media sources that have been beneficial to the Agency's wider communications objectives.

So the campaign has achieved its objectives, fewer people are purchasing dodgy diet pills, and the campaign has paid for itself and delivered a strong return on investment for the health and social care system.

## **5. Campaign phase 2 activity plans**

We will be delivering phase 2 activity focused on STI self-test kits from October 2018. Activity will launch with mainstream media coverage of our press release and social media marketing of our campaign content.

As in previous phases, there will be waves of activity between October 2018 and May 2019 as we develop new content and react to partnership opportunities to engage audiences and encourage sustained behaviour change.

We will make consumers aware of the issue, and give them a clear path and guidance for how to identify, avoid and report falsified medical products.

Unlike the previous, slimming pills phase of the campaign, we cannot use the call to action that consumers should look for the Distance Selling Logo or verify a retailer's legitimacy through the MHRA register. This is because this legislation does not apply to the category of medical devices, which all STI self-test kits fall into. Therefore our call to action for the campaign is as follows:

- Visit our campaign tips on how to spot a false website or product
- Check for CE marks on medical devices
- Click through to trusted third party endorsements of online retailers and sources of free online testing options (NHS)

We will develop innovative and engaging content in-house that will be promoted through a broad mix of channels to ensure we are reaching our target audience and challenging consumer perceptions associated with these products. Activity will include :

Social media content: promotion across our existing channels such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

Campaign pages on gov.uk

Developing case studies and additional media friendly content for sell-in to national and regional media outlets as well as feature pieces for more consumer-focused publications (e.g. lifestyle magazines)

Longer term storyline development in soap operas

### ***Partnered***

We will build relationships with key partners who will endorse the campaign and work with them to activate messaging through their available channels and extend the reach of the campaign. These partners have been identified and prioritised based on their importance to the subject matter and to our audiences. For example: aligning with the PHE *Protect against STI's* campaign and ensuring the NHS pages on STI's carry our key messages.

## **6. Campaign phase 2 activity budget**

Phase 2 of the campaign has an agreed campaign delivery budget of £30,000. Initial planned expenditure was significantly higher however as part of the wider Agency budget review, we have offered savings on the campaign and agreed the activity budget accordingly. As with the previous campaign phase, every effort will be made to firstly explore no cost options to assist with the achievement of our objectives.

## **7. Summary**

The campaign has achieved an extraordinary amount since its establishment and has had a clear demonstrable impact on public health. As we move into a new phase, focused on STI self-test kits, we will be drawing on all the valuable experience gained so far to continue to deliver results against objectives.