



INTERVIEW

'We would be happy to work with Ministry of Consumer Affairs to create an awareness programme'

ASPA's objective is to curb counterfeit products in various sectors and create an awareness programme on how to identify correct authentication solutions. **Arun Agarwal**, General Secretary, ASPA, in an interaction with **Usha Sharma**, feels that in order to address counterfeit problem, there is a need to educate the brand owners



What role does ASPA play in the Indian pharma sector? Authentication Solution Providers' Association (ASPA) was formed in 1998 with the objective to curb counterfeit products in various sectors. It is the only association of its type in the world which has a focus on the advancement of authentication technology and solutions. As an industry body of authentication solutions manufacturers, we encourage our members to adopt best practices, standards and usage of advanced technology in providing cost-effective anti-counterfeiting solutions against counterfeiting. Today, our member companies are providing authentication solutions to more than 10,000 brands globally and many pharma companies are benefiting from solutions provided by our members.

On the other hand, as a social responsibility, we are creating awareness among brands owners and government authorities about issues such as importance of authentication solutions in fighting counterfeiting and how to identify appropriate authentication solutions according to their needs. We are

already working with FICCI-CASCADE (Committee Against Smuggling and Counterfeiting Activities Destroying the Economy), Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), ASSOCHAM and Indian Institute of Packaging (IIP) and keen to provide our support to other industry trade association such as Organisation of Pharmaceutical Producers of India (OPPI) and the Indian Drug Manufacturers' Association (IDMA).

Do you think that online pharmacies be allowed to function or banned in India?

Yes, the concern is correct and very serious. Online selling of products like medicines need clear regulatory guidelines, strong enforcement as well as adoption of solutions that can empower consumers to check the authenticity of medicines for themselves. If all these conditions are met, online pharmacies can definitely provide a safe, convenient channel for purchasing medicines.

Why do you think cases of counterfeit drugs or misuse of holograms are more prevalent

in our country and how to overcome with these challenges?

It is incorrect to say that misuse of holograms is prevalent in India. Holograms are one of the best proven technologies which is used from brand protection application to highly sophisticated application such as currency and passport protection. Holograms as a technology has a lot of potential if used and adopted correctly after carefully studying the problem of counterfeiting on case to case basis. That is the reason, as ASPA, we are creating awareness on how to identify correct authentication solutions, as the counterfeiting problem of FMCG companies cannot be similar to pharma counterfeiting. Further, there is also a need to educate the brand owners about the need to create awareness of their anti-counterfeit feature to their end customers, so that the people look for the anti-counterfeit feature and can easily recognise the same. Moreover, a full-proof solution can be created by using other technologies such as security printing features, barcode, other various features can be added in holograms, which will provide three layers of



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securities. They are:

- Visible and verifiable with naked eye
- Visible and verifiable with portable (pocket size) readers
- Visible and verifiable with Forensic Lab
- Visible and verifiable on SMS, Web and Smart phone with app.

Also, India already has stringent anti-counterfeit regulations for exports, and is contemplating similar regulation for domestically distributed drugs as well. In fact, we are submitting our views on the same to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

Do you agree that Indian FMCG is more regulated and transparent than pharma industry and the number of counterfeit is higher in pharma than FMCG?

It is difficult to say. Measuring counterfeiting is methodologically challenging for various reasons. First, it is an illegal activity and illicit traders attempt to remain invisible and are unlikely to record their activities. Due to security reasons, data on illicit trade is usually difficult to obtain, as law enforcement agencies often prefer not to publicise the scope of their activity. Furthermore, all methods to estimate illicit trade have their limitations and not all studies clearly describe their methodology of these limitations. However, I would like to share an important finding from a report published by FICCI-CASCADE. Barring packaged foods, various industry sectors have shown an increase in grey market percentages. In the FMCG-packaged foods industry, the grey market percentage was estimated at 25.4 per cent in 2008, and 23.4 per cent in 2010. The current study estimates it to have further fallen to 21.7 per cent in 2012. This may mainly be attributable to better use of technology and innovations in the packaging of products to prevent counterfeiting, which counterfeiters have not yet

been able to crack or replicate.

How closely do you work with the government in order to deal with counterfeit problem? Under the 'Make in India' campaign, what are your plans for the pharma sector?

Our industry offers several solutions to curb counterfeiting and our work not only protects, but also enhances government revenue. We help the government achieve its social responsibilities, as our solutions enable the common man to identify a genuine product and save himself from the perils of a counterfeit or adulterated product. We feel that more and more government departments should look at our solutions to protect the various products and documents they issue in public interest. We would be happy to work with the Ministry of Consumer Affairs to create an awareness programme that will educate the people of our country about the perils of counterfeiting. The 'Make in India' initiative is extremely well thought of and is truly the need of the hour. 'Make in India' pharma product has great opportunity in India and overseas market because of their quality. However, with the increase of counterfeiting in pharma sector, there is a constant need to ensure that 'Make in India' pharma product is of highest quality, genuine and secured till its deliver to the end consumer. In us, it is 'Make sure India.' Our industry has developed various new generation authentication solutions which can be easily used in product packaging ensuring that a consumer gets the genuine product. Further, with the help of IT and mobile-based solutions, brand owners, government authorities and consumer can easily have identified them via website, mobile app or SMS verification. We are optimistic and look forward for positive responses from the government and industries to make pharma safe and secure in India.

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