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Evgenia Zinovieva: “Beauty Injections” will not save Russia from counterfeit products”

The explosive growth of the “gray cosmetics” market has been provoked by Western sanctions and the exit of cosmetics brands from Russia. We have seen “gray” suppliers from Asia come into other countries with very low-quality unlicensed counterfeit goods. It is also troubling that despite the risk of losing one’s health, cheap fakes are actively purchased by a good half of our women.

The Association of Importers of Cosmetology, Cosmetics and Medical Products has taken up the task of protecting the Russian market and consumers from fraudsters. Evgenia Zinovieva, Chairperson of the AICCMP, answered questions of the BM Moscow Foresight magazine and stated:

- According to multiple open sources, currently there are 10% to 55% of illicit injectable products for aesthetic medicine circulating in Russia: botulinum toxins, intradermal implants (fillers), biorevitalizants and also surface anesthetics, often used in conjunction with injectable products.

Experts estimate the turnover of unregistered or forged drugs and medical products for the beauty industry at ₽100 billion, which makes up for 40% of the total market.

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Now we are speaking of registered products only, but we should keep in mind the growing numbers of unregistered products, freely available at marketplaces and used without any supervision, often at a person's home. This criminal sector has no official oversight, because Roszdravnadzor (the Federal Health Care Supervisory Agency) only inspects those companies with medical licenses.

Lack of awareness about dangers of improper application of beauty products among both patients and those "pseudo cosmetologists" is a massive issue. Neither doctors, nor patients ever consider checking for state registration of a drug, and even those who have relevant concerns are often clueless of where and how this information could be accessed.

Furthermore, there is the issue of low-quality education of specialists and huge numbers of those, who lack medical education but make money off of "beauty injections" in offices, lacking medical licenses.

- Evgenia Vladimirovna, you head the largest Association in Europe. What is your view of the organization's mission and objectives?

- Today the AICCMP is an organization that is unique in its functions, scale and capabilities. We bring together beauty industry businesses, cosmetic and medical product manufacturers, some of the healthcare community and end users, patients.

We realize that it would be impossible to resolve all issues at once, this is why we had determined the range of top priorities for the AICCMP early on.

The Association primarily protects all of the Russian market players from counterfeit goods. We are maintaining a system for original product management and product quality control, and we also supervise compliance of clinics and doctors with professional standards.

One of the most challenging tasks of the AICCMP is mitigation of adverse effects, caused by use of counterfeit products. We are committed to promoting awareness of aesthetic medicine customers.

I have listed the priorities of the AICCMP, but there are other pressing issues, addressed to us by members of the Association: issues with state registration, inspections, taxation, customs regulations and many others.

- How was the Association of Importers of Cosmetology, Cosmetics and Medical Products established?

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- The Association was founded in 2023. Once a member, an exclusive distributor of a Korean manufacturer, called for support, when it had turned out that products, for which state registration was pending, were available on the market as fake products without any authorization from the distributor. An examination, performed after a controlled buy, confirmed that the products were counterfeit. The manufacturer had shut down its production line and the product was no longer supplied to markets of other countries. However, “pseudo entrepreneurs” from Russia’s southern regions had decided to continue “production” of counterfeit Korean and Chinese brands and flooded the market with fakes. The investigative authorities initiated criminal proceedings under Article 238.1 of the Criminal Code of the RF.

During a raid, law enforcement officers seized counterfeit products for the total amount of □50 million. Court proceedings resulted in a tough verdict, the criminals were sentenced to long prison terms.

Regularly dealing with various fraud and counterfeit issues and lacking case law practices under Article 238.1 of the Criminal Code of the RF, specialists had concluded that it was high time to establish a non-profit organization to deal with the existing issues of the aesthetics market. This was how the Association of Importers of Cosmetology, Cosmetics and Medical Products was founded.

- What measures to combat counterfeit products do you propose?

- Today fighting sellers and suppliers of illicit products and also home-based doctors, performing unlicensed services, has become extremely complex. Only rare administrative proceedings are initiated against these fraudsters.

According to the Administrative Code, the fine for first offense of this type is □2,5 thousand, which, of course, is hardly any deterrent. At the same time, if natural persons provide aesthetic services without a proper license, they are left out of the scope of oversight by Rospotrebnadzor (The Federal Service for Oversight of Consumer Rights Protection and Well-Being) or Roszdravnadzor. There are two Articles providing for criminal liability (171 and 235), however, they only apply to criminals, inflicting major harm or causing death of patients.

It is high time to amend the laws: it is necessary to classify all natural persons (including self-employed ones), providing aesthetic services, as subject to oversight by the supervising ministries.

It is also very important to maintain proper records (exact formulae and specific storage conditions) for botulinum toxin group drugs. Usage manuals for these drugs specify proper storage conditions and application of such drugs only on clinic premises.

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Today these drugs are freely available to natural persons.

I also believe that those doctors, performing aesthetic medicine services at home, should be stripped of their licenses, because they pose a threat to health and lives of patients.

As for our Association, we are dealing with issues of inferior quality cosmetology products at various levels of implementation and promotion of social projects, legal initiatives, and are also educating the broad public and cosmetologists, advocating for required use by patients of registered products only.

I believe we have contributed to development of a few efficient solutions to combat the “gray” market segment, counterfeit and low-quality products. In particular, we have engaged IT professionals to assist us in development of a unique tool for checking medical products – Medinspector Telegram bot. The bot provides for a quick and simple check of a registration certificate for a medical product by several parameters – both by product name and manufacturer name.

Moreover, during a control check it is easy to send a message through the bot to the Association, if an inferior or suspicious medical product is identified or if a person has any actual health concerns. I would also point out that even buying medical products with registration certificates at marketplaces, you cannot be sure that storage and transportation rules have been followed properly.

A product could be checked both by doctors and patients. It would be good if marketplaces used the bot prior to placing a product at their platforms. We are working on this too, but this, regretfully, is a very slow-moving story.

- There have been media reports of an initiative to set up an innovative system in Russia for marking original products with highly secure marks. Please tell us about it.

- Special markings, based on anti-Stokes high resolution compounds, which are currently used as protective marks on banknotes – dollars and roubles – have been developed specifically for members of the Association and are currently used in real life. For now, this is the only protective method, which is impossible to counterfeit or copy, as a QR code, for example.

This marking has several security features, one color or a combination thereof, it is also resistant to aggressive environments – acids, alkali and high temperatures. And it can be checked by a convenient light “detector” in the form of a compact and affordable “pencil flashlight”.

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- What are the advantages of the Association membership for companies, seeking to secure a spot on the Russian market?

- Any manufacturer or representative in Russia would find the Association membership beneficial, because any private business requires expert support. And we can provide this support at any lifecycle stage of a product to be supplied to the Russian market.

- Is there any international cooperation in combating counterfeit products today?

- It should be noted, that we have fruitful cooperation on various issues, including inquiries of the Association members in terms of safety of cosmetology, beauty and medical products. Currently, for instance, a partnership agreement has been made with the Trade Department of the Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Moscow.

- Russia remains the largest consumer of cosmetics in Eastern Europe with the share of about 50%. In your opinion, will the current alarming market situation with counterfeit products persist going forward, or will it be overcome by beauty and cosmetology “monsters” from France, Great Britain, Spain and Italy?

- I believe the situation with the saturation of the Russian market with counterfeit cosmetology, cosmetics and medical products will change for the better. We must beat counterfeit products! Our country, having learned from its adverse experience, is extremely interested in getting only high-quality products, especially for the beauty industry support.

Alexei Chernov.

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