

Zuellig Pharma's John Graham on strengthening medicine authenticity across Asia

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Secure digital marketplaces, traceability systems and closer coordination across the healthcare supply chain can help reduce exposure to counterfeit and unauthorised medicines.



Counterfeit and unauthorised healthcare products remain a persistent risk across Asia, particularly where fragmented distribution networks, uneven infrastructure and unregulated online channels make oversight more difficult. As counterfeiters adopt more sophisticated packaging and digital marketing methods, verification increasingly depends on the integrity and traceability of the entire supply chain rather than visual inspection at the point of sale.

Digital marketplaces, blockchain-based product verification, artificial intelligence and real-time shipment monitoring are being used to create more secure links between pharmaceutical manufacturers, licensed distributors, clinics and pharmacies. Zuellig Pharma has expanded its digital platforms to support product traceability and connect authorised suppliers with more than 120,000 healthcare providers across Asia.

John Graham, Group Chief Executive Officer of Zuellig Pharma, discusses how the company is using digital tools to intercept demand for counterfeit products, the operational challenges of maintaining quality across diverse markets and the collaboration required to curb fraudulent medical advertisements.

How is Zuellig Pharma leveraging AI and advanced digital tools to identify and intercept counterfeit healthcare products more effectively than traditional methods?

Traditional methods of relying on visual inspections or even standalone tracking tools are often reactive. Our technology strategy has evolved from single-point verification tools - such as our eZTracker platform, which uses blockchain technology to help consumers identify unauthorised products - toward building a more secure digital marketplace for pharmaceutical products.

To achieve this, we transformed our EZ Rx platform into a full B2B commercialization engine, leveraging advanced AI, including chatbots, recommendation engines, and smart targeting, which connects trusted pharmaceutical companies directly to Asia's clinics and pharmacies, by offering the most convenient and cost-effective purchasing experience.

This marketplace enables us to build and keep clients within a secure ecosystem, ensuring every buyer interaction around pharmaceuticals and medical therapies are legitimate.

By making the legitimate digital supply chain the most technologically advanced and easiest option to use, we naturally intercept the demand for counterfeit healthcare products in fragmented, high-risk channels.

What does the future of a secure, counterfeit-proof supply chain look like in Asia over the next decade?

Integrity across the entire supply chain matters, not just the point of sale. Patients and healthcare providers need to be able to buy healthcare products with confidence from regulated, licensed distributors, in which each step of the supply chain is traceable and accountable. Digital orchestration and traceability technologies that enable real-time data sharing and shipment tracking can strengthen transparency and collaboration across the healthcare supply chain. By giving stakeholders greater visibility into product movement and potential risks, these solutions help ensure patients receive timely access to high-quality healthcare products without compromising safety or integrity.

This is especially important for underserved and remote regions where fragmented healthcare systems and infrastructure constraints make oversight more difficult to maintain. Extending the same traceability and accountability to these regions, alongside larger cities is what will ensure medicine never comes at the cost of their authenticity. Achieving this will require the support of regulators, manufacturers, distributors and healthcare providers working together. Access to medicine never comes at the cost of its authenticity.

From Zuellig Pharma's perspective, what are the primary operational challenges in maintaining quality assurance across diverse and complex regional markets?

A primary challenge is market complexity. This includes fragmented healthcare systems, uneven infrastructure, and lengthy or varied regulatory pathways, which mean that each market presents a different set of conditions to manage quality against, and there is no single approach that applies uniformly across the region. Workforce capability is another challenge to ensure quality in healthcare products, since quality is only as strong as the people executing it day to day.

At Zuellig Pharma, we address this by combining a strong regional quality framework with deep local market expertise, so that global standards are applied in ways that are practical and relevant to each market. This is why we place strong emphasis on ongoing training and capability-building across markets, cultivating a culture of quality that equips every individual to uphold the highest standards of integrity through training and workshop sessions that address pressing issues and align local practices with regional quality standards. We also believe supply chains must be responsive to patient needs and quality risks alike, anticipating potential disruptions and responding quickly so that consistent quality is maintained even as conditions shift from market to market.

As counterfeit goods become more sophisticated, what specific verification protocols should patients and providers prioritise to ensure product authenticity?

Verifying authenticity must shift from inspecting the product to validating its source. The most critical protocol for any healthcare provider is to procure exclusively through a secure, closed-loop digital environment.

This is why we expanded our EZ Rx into a comprehensive B2B marketplace that connects manufacturers and authorized sellers directly to over 120,000 healthcare providers across Asia.

This direct-to-clinic model builds trust in the product's origin, giving providers absolute confidence in what they purchase. By operating within this trusted ecosystem, we eliminate the risks of unverified sellers and ensure authenticity at the point of transaction - long before a product ever reaches a clinic's shelves.

How can regulated distribution channels collaborate more closely with social media platforms to curb the spread of fake medical advertisements?

Social media has become an important channel through which people access health information and engage with health-related content. However, that same reach means it can just as easily spread inaccurate or misleading claims, including product authenticity.

Distribution channels play a role beyond the supply chain itself. One starting point is to use their own social media and communication channels to proactively advocate for verified, authorized sources, and to be clear and visible about which products and sellers are legitimate. It is also important to quickly flag when a specific risk is identified. Earlier this year, we issued a public warning after illegally compounded and unauthorized versions of Tirzepatide began circulating through social media and unregulated online sellers in the Philippines, alerting patients and healthcare professionals to the serious risks involved and help prevent further harm.

Addressing the spread of such fraudulent medical advertisements requires regulated distributors, digital platforms, and regulators to treat the issue as a shared responsibility. This means acting quickly to identify and remove misleading content, strengthening monitoring and enforcement, and ensuring the public has access to clear, credible information on how to obtain authentic medicines safely.