

Quality of Medicines at the Heart of Health Systems

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Abstract

The Medicine Quality Monitoring Globe: online news to monitor substandard and falsified medical products.

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Substandard and falsified (SF) medical products threaten public health and can undermine confidence in health systems. Yet, surveillance and data-sharing remain fragmented and difficult to access. To address this gap the Medicine Quality Monitoring Globe ([MQM Globe](#)) was developed as an online platform that collects and maps information on SF medical products from online news and regulatory sources. The MQM Globe is the only publicly available media-monitoring system on SF medical products and aims to support open-source intelligence for public health security.

To assess performance of online news in the MQM Globe, reports captured were compared with 30 WHO Medical Product Alerts issued between 2020 and 2023, covering 95 medicine-incidents. Sensitivity increased from 77% using English-language reports alone to 97% when combining multiple languages. For 20% of medicine-incidents, news reports appeared before the corresponding WHO alert, with a median of 9 days.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the MQM Globe demonstrated its value as an intelligence-support tool. Nearly 1,300 poor-quality COVID-19 medical product events were identified across 88 countries. Reported quality issues shifted over time, with peaks for diagnostics, sanitisers and personal protective equipment early in the pandemic, followed by SF COVID-19 vaccines after vaccine introduction.

Interpretation of online news data requires caution, as there are challenges such as newsworthiness, language coverage and lack of validation affecting the data. Reports therefore require verification and corroboration, and absence of reports should not be interpreted as absence of SF medical products.

Online news monitoring cannot replace regulatory or laboratory-based surveillance. However, as a complementary intelligence tool, the MQM Globe provides additional situational awareness, and it identifies signals that require further investigation. The MQM Globe also highlights the need for improved information sharing and integration across regulators, public health agencies, researchers and other stakeholders working to tackle SF medical products.