



Department for Environment
Food and Rural Affairs

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Thirteen convicted for £6m vet medicine smuggling

Thirteen people have been convicted in connection with Europe's biggest ever illegal veterinary medicine business in which more than £6 million of products were smuggled to the UK, risking the health of people and animals.

The ringleaders, Ronald Meddes, 73, and his wife Regine Lansley, 62, sold unauthorised and prescription-only medicines to more than 4,000 British customers from their properties in France and from warehouses in Belgium and Kent.

Six other key players unlawfully distributed the products on the black market to British farms, stables, kennels and vet surgeries. Three other major customers were convicted, as well as one man responsible for laundering the proceeds.

Steve Dean, Chief Executive of the Government's Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD), which prosecuted the case, said:

"This was a significant commercial enterprise which seriously attacked the principle of safe and effective veterinary medicines.

"Incorrect use of medication of unknown origin and dubious quality compromises animal health and welfare, increases the risk of harmful residues in the food chain and raises the spectre of unnecessary antibiotic resistance."

The medicines included non steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, anabolic steroids, antibiotics, sedatives, and pain control treatments for a variety of species including horses, cows, sheep, pigs and household pets.

To be imported and sold for use in the UK all veterinary medicines must be authorised to ensure they are safe and effective, and many must be prescribed by a veterinary surgeon. Even where medicines are authorised they must be distributed and sold through licensed outlets where trained staff are available to provide the necessary advice on safe use.

Between January 2004 and November 2010 Meddes and Lansley ran a series of businesses under the "Eurovet" banner such as ZAO Eurovet International, Euro Exports CIS Limited, Global Animal Pharmaceuticals and the Animal Pharmacy. Many of the medicines were sold to the UK customers by telephone, fax and online.

Defra Investigation Services began investigating, on behalf of VMD, in 2006 after small seizures of illegal medicines in other investigations were linked back to a single source. Large seizures were made at Ashford and Dover in Kent, Aldershot in Hampshire, and Stanstead Airport.

In May 2007 the French authorities, on behalf of the VMD, seized more than 20 tonnes of medicines – the biggest seizure in Europe – from Lansley and Meddes' property in Picardy. Computer accounts and customer details for the whole illegal enterprise were found. The turnover between January 2004 and May 2007 was £5.6m.

However, Meddes and Lansley quickly re-established their business in Belgium until the Belgium authorities raided and seized further large quantities of illegal veterinary medicines in October 2008.

At Croydon Crown Court, Meddes, of Picardy and Charing, Kent, and Lansley, of Picardy, and Chelsea, London, admitted illegally importing and supplying unauthorised and prescription-only veterinary medicines. He was sentenced to 28 months imprisonment and she was sentenced to 20 months imprisonment.

Another four defendants admitted illegally supplying unauthorised and prescription-only veterinary medicines: Igor Kantov, 54, a driver and assistant from Normandy and Southend-on-Sea, was sentenced to 2 years conditional discharge; his wife Cherryl Kantov, 64, a bookkeeper, was sentenced to 2 years conditional discharge ; Alexandra John, 50, an agent from Capel, Surrey, was sentenced to 12 months imprisonment suspended for 2 years and 200 hours unpaid work; and Andris Friend, 45, a wholesaler from Spalding, Lincolnshire, was sentenced to 13 months imprisonment.

Two others were found guilty at trial of illegal importation and supply: riding school boss Peter Lock, 53, of Doddinghurst, Essex, was sentenced to 10 months imprisonment suspended 2 years and 250 hours unpaid work; stud boss Richard Jones, 60, of Sedgeberrow, Worcestershire, was sentenced to 6 months imprisonment suspended 2 years and 200 hours unpaid work and [his partner] June Connelly, 68, of Sedgeberrow, Worcestershire, who pleaded guilty was sentenced to 4 months imprisonment suspended 2 years and 140 hours unpaid work.

Having set up a company and a bank account, Mark Harvey, 52, of Sissinghurst, Kent, admitted money laundering and was sentenced to 12 months imprisonment suspended 2 years and 275 hours unpaid work.

Richard James, 44, of Carmarthen, Wales, admitted supply, possession and administration for use in his artificial insemination business and was sentenced to 100 hours unpaid work; confiscation £45551.88 to be paid by 7 October 2011 – 16 months imprisonment in default of payment.

Beef farmer John Andrew Hawley, of Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire, admitted possession for use on his own animals and was sentenced to community order 100 hours unpaid work and £2,500 in costs.

Lee Wilson (aka Leonard French), 73, of Langworth, Lincolnshire, admitted charges of possession, importation, supply and will be sentenced on 9 September.

Notes

The companies in this case with the name Eurovet had no connection or involvement whatsoever with the bona-fide veterinary medicines company "Eurovet Animal Health BV or its UK branch Eurovet Animal Health Limited based in Cambridge".