



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**HEALTH SCIENCES AUTHORITY
PRESS RELEASE**

4 AUGUST 2011

HSA AND ICA FOIL ILLEGAL SUPPLY OF SLEEPING PILLS

The Health Sciences Authority (HSA) and Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) have foiled the illegal supply of approximately 10,000 midazolam sleeping pills. The Enforcement Branch of HSA conducted an operation in the Woodlands area on 26 July 2011 to seize the tablets, labeled as “hwa” (力月西 马来酸咪达唑仑), following an alert from ICA’s Air Cargo Command. These tablets contain midazolam and were illegally imported without the required licence. HSA has apprehended a middle-aged Singaporean man in connection with this case. He admitted to having assisted an unidentified PRC national to import these sleeping pills illegally for monetary gains.

2 The pair attempted to evade detection at the ICA Air Cargo Command by hiding the sleeping pills in steel flasks and making a false declaration of its contents on the import documents. However, ICA’s vigilance and state-of-the art technology paid off when these 10,000 sleeping pills were detected on the morning of 26 July 2011.

3 HSA’s Enforcement Branch was alerted and an operation was carefully planned and executed by its officers to seize the midazolam pills. The coordinated effort by HSA and ICA has curtailed the supply of these sleeping pills, intended for illicit sale and profit. Investigations are currently on-going.

ABOUT MIDAZOLAM

4 Midazolam is a substance which affects a person’s mental activity and behaviour and also alters a person’s mood. It is a substance controlled under the Poisons Act and used medically to induce sleep or relieve anxiety. Midazolam may induce amnesia (memory loss), as well as other adverse effects including low blood pressure, visual disturbances, headaches, loss of muscular coordination and confusion. It is a potent drug which should only be taken under the supervision of a qualified medical practitioner. However, midazolam is also used by drug addicts as an alternative drug substitute. Prolonged use/abuse may lead to physical and psychological dependence. Midazolam tablets have also been known to be crushed by drug addicts and administered by an injection into the blood. Intravenous administration of crushed midazolam tablets may cause life-threatening respiratory and cardiovascular reactions in the user.

ADVISORY

5 Our borders are our first line of defence in safeguarding Singapore's security. ICA has tightened the security checks on passengers and vehicles at the checkpoints to prevent attempts to smuggle in undesirable persons, drugs, weapons, explosives and other contrabands. The same methods of concealment used by contraband smugglers may be used by terrorists to smuggle arms and explosives to carry out attacks in Singapore. The enhanced security checks are critical to our nation's security.

6 HSA takes a serious view against those engaged in the importation and sales of midazolam without an import licence from the Authority and will take strong enforcement action against those importing midazolam illegally.

7 HSA reminds the public that it is an offence for anyone found importing or selling substances listed in the Poisons Act without the necessary licences from the Authority. Anyone found guilty of an offence under the Poisons Act is liable on conviction, to a fine of up to \$10,000 and/or imprisonment for a term of up to two years.

8 Members of the public are encouraged to contact HSA's Enforcement Branch at Tel: 68663485 (Monday – Friday) or email: hsa_is@hsa.gov.sg if they have any information on the illegal import or sale of midazolam or other health products.

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▪ **About the Health Sciences Authority (HSA)**

The Health Sciences Authority (HSA) is a multidisciplinary agency that applies medical, pharmaceutical and scientific expertise through its three professional groups, Health Products Regulation, Blood Services, Applied Sciences, to protect and advance national health and safety. It serves as the national regulator for health products, ensuring they are wisely regulated to meet standards of safety, quality and efficacy. It operates the national blood bank, Bloodbank@HSA, securing the nation's blood supply. It also applies specialised scientific, forensic, investigative and analytical capabilities in serving the administration of justice. For more details, visit www.hsa.gov.sg.

▪ **About HSA's Health Products Regulation Group**

The Health Products Regulation Group (HPRG) of HSA contributes to the development of biomedical sciences in Singapore by administering a robust, scientific and responsive regulatory framework. It ensures that drugs, innovative therapeutics, medical devices and health-related products are wisely regulated and meet appropriate safety, quality and efficacy standards.

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Photos of midazolam sleeping pills seized by HSA and ICA



