The Food and Drugs Authority marked the fourth annual #MedSafetyWeek with other medicine regulatory authorities across the world with a social media campaign to raise awareness of medicine side effects, and the importance of reporting them. This year's campaign focused on polypharmacy, with the overarching message that, reporting side effects helps protect patients when taking multiple medicines.

The Food and Drugs Authority (FDA) participated in the annual social media campaign and supported the importance of reporting side effects through the Med Safety App. The App can be downloaded from the app store or google play. #MedSafetyWeek is a joint effort between 57 medicine regulatory authorities across the globe.
Polypharmacy is defined as the simultaneous use of four or more prescription, over-the-counter or traditional medicines at the same time. Polypharmacy increases the likelihood of a patient having side effects, due to the increased risk of interactions between medicines, and with foods or herbal products.

Although polypharmacy is common in older people, anyone who routinely uses multiple medicines at the same time can be affected. This includes people with long-term chronic conditions, who regularly take multiple medicines. Studies show that one third of people over 75 years old take at least six medicines, with over a million people taking eight or more medicines daily. Multiple medicines can be beneficial, but it’s important to report side effects when they occur.

Patient’s susceptibility to experiencing side effects increase with age, when medicines are not being metabolised as efficiently as before or the patient is more sensitive to their effects. Patients who take multiple medicines can also experience increased drug–drug interactions. Reporting side effects help in understanding the benefits and risks of medicines in clinical use and can lead to the discovery of previously unknown side effects and interactions.

This campaign forms part of a global initiative led by Uppsala Monitoring Centre (UMC) – the World Health Organisation (WHO) Collaborating Centre for International Drug Monitoring – in collaboration with the Heads of Medicines Agencies (HMA) and the International Coalition of Medicines Regulatory Authorities (ICMRA).

The FDA is encouraging healthcare professionals to review their patients’ medications intake, especially when prescribing and administrating multiple medicines, as well as being vigilant to monitor, detect and report suspected side effects using the Med Safety App. Reporting plays an important role in helping the FDA monitor the safe use of medicines to protect public health through effective regulation.