

All credit to Beijing for curbs on fake medicine

CHINA has stepped up moves to crack down on the rampant sale of fake medicines. The official media revealed this week that the State Council was strengthening supervision over the manufacture and sale of shoddy medicinal products.

The move must come as a welcome relief to the ever suffering people of China where imitation products, including medicine, and shoddy goods and non-existent customer services are part and parcel of everyday life.

Unlike shoddy household or luxury products, fake medicines pose a real danger to health — they could easily lead to death. That the central government has decided to tackle this issue shows the leadership is beginning to put a higher premium on the value of human life.

China has a long history of producing herbal medicines. Since 1949 the authorities have combined traditional Chinese medicine with Western techniques.

In recent years, there has been a shift back to private health care that is filling the gaps in

China's socialised medicine. This may have attracted some charlatans who prey on people's ignorance and superstition.

Many Chinese are firm believers in the healing powers derived from a pharmacopoeia that ranges from lotus seeds to deer horns, from dog testicles to snake gall, from bat excrement to human fingernails.

The most enthusiastic users of these traditional remedies are, without a doubt, the Cantonese. Back in 1981 a mainland pharmacologist declared that China's famed pearl cream — widely used by women, both Chinese and foreign, to preserve a youthful look — is "useless and may even be dangerous". Similar warnings have been issued over the years by our own Consumer Council about a variety of products.

Over the millenia, trial and error in China have demonstrated that certain substances do have genuinely curative qualities. Others, however, are "useless and may even be dangerous". All credit to Beijing for cracking down on the rampant sales of fake medicine.