

Health experts discuss counterfeit medicine

An international conference discussing threats of counterfeit medicine and their effects on patients in Africa is underway in Johannesburg.

Sponsored by Pfizer, a leading medical drug manufacturer, the three day conference aims to tackle issues around unregistered generics and to develop joint plans of action to address this issue.

World Health Organisation Representative, Dr Moses Chisale said the threat that counterfeit medicines pose to society is very real.

"Counterfeit medicines are present in all regions but those areas where regulatory and legal oversight are weakest bear the brunt of the problem."

Dr Chisale said even though the exact magnitude of the problem is unknown in different parts of the world, the usage of counterfeit medicine is growing.

"Combating counterfeiting is a shared responsibility involving relevant government agencies, manufacturers, distributors, health professionals, consumers and the general public.

He said governments have to create the appropriate environment for the participation of all concerned partners.

According to WHO, a counterfeit or fake drug is a medicine which is deliberately and fraudulently mislabelled with respect to identity or source.

Counterfeiting poses an important public health issue. They can cause serious health problems, and can result in death. About 2,500 people have died in the West African countries already.

"We believe that patients who require our medicines should get a safe and effective medicine and not a potentially dangerous counterfeit," Pfizer Regional Director for Africa, Karl Lintel said.

"We are committed as a company to do all we can to keep fake medicines out of the marketplace so that they are not a threat to patient health. This conference is a demonstration of our commitment."

Counterfeit medicines are a global problem from which no region is exempt.

While it is difficult to accurately describe the full scope of the counterfeiting problem, reported seizures of counterfeit

medicines do serve as a useful baseline.

Since 2004, authorities have seized more than 30 million counterfeit Pfizer tablets, and enough active pharmaceutical ingredients to manufacture over 50 million more.

The conference is attended by twenty customs officials, medicine regulators and government representatives from ten sub-Saharan countries, as well as representatives from the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Pharmaceutical Security Institute (PSI).

The program includes workshops during which the participants share experiences and develop comprehensive action plans to help keep medicine supplies in Africa secure and safe.

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