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Killer paracetamol: Death toll hits 39

Written by Akoni Olasunkanmi, Chioma Obinna, Adeyemi Ogundele & Pamela Alimonu
Thursday, 27 November 2008

THE Lagos State government, yesterday, announced that the killer paracetamol, My Pikin, had claimed 14 new lives in the state, bringing the total death toll to 39.

The National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) had on Tuesday declared that 25 deaths were recorded in different hospitals across the Federation. According to NAFDAC, 15 died at the Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH), eight at Ahmadu Bello University Teaching Hospital (ABUTH), Zaria, and two at the University College Hospital (UCH), Ibadan. The drug was produced by Barewa Pharmaceuticals Limited, based in Lagos.

However, Barewa Pharmaceuticals, manufacturers of My Pikin have denied the allegation that their product was responsible for the deaths of 39 children.

Lagos State Commissioner for Information and Strategy, Mr. Opeyemi Bamidele, and Commissioner for Health, Dr. Jide Idris, disclosed this at a joint press conference at Alausa, Ikeja, yesterday, saying the 29

deaths were recorded by LUTH and Lagos State University Teaching Hospital, Ikeja (LASUTH). According to Dr Idris, they were preceded by symptoms including inability to pass urine, fever, puffiness of the face, vomiting, diarrhoea, cough and catarrh.

He attributed the possible cause of deaths to teething syrup, herbal concoctions, paracetamol overdose or poisoning.

According to him, the development was first reported last week when there was an upsurge in the cases of acute renal failure reported across various Local Government Areas (LGAs) of the state.

He added that the age range of those affected was between six months and eight years. Idris said immediately the state government got the report, it swung into action to stop further circulation and usage of the drug.

His words: "After the first case was recorded, a lot of meetings were held between officials of the Federal Government, LUTH and the state's surveillance team where samples were collected and mothers interviewed with a view to finding out what could be the cause of the problem.

"From investigations carried out so far, the possible cause is the teething syrup that mothers gave to their children, some herbal concoctions and some of these syrups contain paracetamol either in high doses or the product contains improper chemical," he said.

Idris then urged parents, especially mothers, to refrain forthwith from using the killer paracetamol, My Pikin teething mixture till further notice.

"We are also appealing to all public and private hospitals that all cases of renal failure should be reported to the disease control directorate of the Lagos State Ministry of Health," the commissioner said.

On the current efforts to stem the spread, Idris said samples of the suspected materials had been sent for investigation by NAFDAC, surveillance activities was ongoing, while education of caregivers on possible causes and preventive measures commenced.

The state government, therefore, recommended that all children with inability to pass urine/or puffiness of the face should be immediately taken to the hospital for proper medical attention, while drugs should be purchased only from registered pharmaceutical outlets.

On the mop up exercise by the state government, Idris said efforts were already on to cleanse markets of the killer product, "and the effectiveness of the monitoring team is not in doubt," he assured.

He added that the first thing a responsible government does in such cases was to set up a surveillance system to find out the cause and nature of the problem.

Idris, therefore, called for support and collaboration of all health care providers, stakeholders, media and general public to be vigilant and stop further usage or spread of the deadly product.

My Pikin not responsible for deaths — Company chairman

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Chairman of Barewa Pharmaceuticals, Mr. Kola Okunlola, dismissed allegations by the agency that the teething mixture was responsible for the deaths of 25 children nationwide, demanding evidence of the allegation.

According to Okunlola, the company was surprised by the allegations of NAFDAC in the face of facts by some of the Teaching Hospitals disclaiming the reports by NAFDAC.

“The company does not only have NAFDAC licence to produce the drug, but it has produced thousands of the drugs for more than two years without complaints from users or NAFDAC. The company also said it has come out clean from routine inspections of its production facilities and products by relevant government agencies including NAFDAC.

“As a responsible corporate citizen of Nigeria and one that is involved in the protection and promotion of good health, we are shocked at the claims of deaths of children in some of the nation’s hospitals.

“We are, however, bothered that there are conflicting claims between NAFDAC and the teaching hospitals regarding the deaths and the cause of such deaths.

“For instance, the Chairman of the Medical Advisory Committee of the University of Ibadan Teaching Hospital has disputed claims that some children died in the hospital. We also note that the Chief Medical Director of the Lagos University Teaching Hospital has also disputed claims that the deaths recorded in the hospital were due to the consumption of a particular drug. As the CMD said, only a conclusive laboratory test will reveal the cause of such deaths

“As operators in the health sector committed to the promotion of good health, we are shocked and sympathetic to the patients and their family. We are interested in the investigation of the cause of such deaths.

This explains why we instructed our lawyers to address a letter to NAFDAC, requesting a copy of the result of the tests.

“We hereby affirm our readiness to cooperate with NAFDAC and other relevant agencies to establish the truth in this case.

We also wish to allay fears about the reliability of our products. We are a responsible corporate citizen of Nigeria and have operated in the past years in compliance with the best of international standards to promote good health in the country and beyond,” the statement said.

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1

God save us!

Written by [Emmanuel Kalu Azumah](#), on 27-11-2008 07:19 , IP: 41.205.162.178

It's heart breaking that the authorities could allow such a deadly drug into the Nigerian market. Why is everybody crying foul; because it has led to the death of Innocent children. It's very unfortunate. Those who took part in the illicit deal should be tried for murder. My heart goes to the families of the deceased innocent children. May God save us from killer drugs like My Pikin.

2

My Re:Pikin not responsible for deaths —

Written by [Mr. Blessing Umanah](#), on 27-11-2008 08:53 , IP: 81.199.62.226

NAFDAC and the Ministry of Health should urgently go to the market and randomly buy some bottles of the syrup and carry out test and analysis to determine whether it is the cause of the deaths of the affected children. Further more, the mothers of the dead children should be asked were they bought the drugs and such chemist/pharmacy should be visited and samples collected for test. It may be possible that there is a particular batch that was produced and sent to the market that is responsible for the deaths. It is also possible that there is a fake My Pikin syrup that is being produced by some persons other than the actual manufacturer (Barewa Pharmaceuticals) of the product being circulated in the market.

I wish to advise that NAFDAC should as a matter of urgency carry out raid on chemists all over the country to search for fake drugs and trace their manufacturers.

Blessing Umanah,
Sapele

3

Buck passing

Written by [Wale John](#), on 27-11-2008 09:39 , IP: 92.14.244.49

I think NAFDAC should have been alerted immediately the drug was suspected to be the cause of the deaths. Nigeria is too enmeshed in bureaucratic bottlenecks, so the hospitals are now claiming they had reported to the ministry of Health instead of NAFDAC. The claim by the Chairman of the pharma company does not hold water, no drug regulatory agency in the world tests every batch of product a company manufactures. They only carry out regular assessments of Pharma companies. The onus is on the industries to design robust in house quality assurance methods that will ensure the purity, identity and quality of raw materials, intermediate products and the drug released into the market. The fact the the coy has used diethylene glycol instead of propylene glycol shows that its quality control measures are less than desirable

4

Written by [Alex ifeanyi](#), on 27-11-2008 12:11 , IP: 41.223.65.3

does NAFDAC have proof?

is the company credited by merit or by cash?

is this story a ploy to destroy the company?

there should be a thorough investigation to ascertain the facts cos someone has to answer for these death. FOR GOD'S SAKE THESE ARE CHILDREN, OUR FUTURE.

5

Agents of Satan

Written by [John Essien](#), on 27-11-2008 12:35 , IP: 41.219.200.130

It is an established fact that in Nigeria cognisance is not given to the sanctity of blood. This phenomenon has continued to bleed God's heart. The nigerian government is not helping matters, otherwise these agents of satan who are bent in destroying the leaders of tomorrow (nigerian children) should have been brought to book before now.

6

PUNISHMENT IS NECESSARY

Written by [AGUEKPE J](#), on 27-11-2008 16:22 , IP: 196.45.193.218

Before the drug went into circulation approval must have been given from the Ministry of Health, NAFDAC, etc. Therefore, punishment is not only necessary but must be vicarious because many innocent souls have been lost and some people caused it. Pathetic citizens will join the affected families to monitor the outcome of the action of the State Government. I send my condolence to all the deased families. May the innocent lost souls rest in the bosom of the LORD; Amen

7

Killer Paracetamol

Written by [Osamagbe M. Ighile](#), on 27-11-2008 18:44 , IP: 81.199.60.3

This is very unfortunate. Our future lies with the babies being sent to their infant graves for no error of their own. It simply shows that we have a long way to go. This is obviously a Big challenge for NAFDAC that has done so well in the past. This is not the time to trade blames but surely a moment of reflection and rescue mission for those still on the cutting edge of death.

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