

# MENACE OF FAKE AND COUNTERFEIT DRUGS

A final year student of Agricultural extension was in heat of preparation for sessional examinations when a bout of fever unexpectedly unnerved him. Throughout the night he shivered ceaselessly like a lurch of seed being rocked by a furious wind.

After consulting a doctor he headed to a nearby market for some drugs. He came back with packs of what he thought were drugs, medicaments that would solve his problem. He only realised how abortive his trip to the market had been only after he had consumed the drugs for the umpteenth time without having any relief. He had actually bought tablets of fake chloroquine.

Categories of medications which should not be found in pharmaceutical, clinical, hospital and other health delivery centres include fake, adulterated, expired and blacklisted drugs.

Drugs deteriorate with time, the rate being dependent on the nature of drug, dosage form and storage temperature. Optimum therapeutic response is usually not achieved after a certain degree of deterioration. Storage of drugs at high temperature conditions enhances degradation and renders them useless in a short time. This is why they must be stored at specified low temperature. Custodians of drugs must therefore as a matter of necessity adhere to this rule and ensure that expired drugs are removed from the shelves accordingly. Expiry date usually depicts maximum storage time beyond which optimum clinical response is not guaranteed.

Various countries have their respective drug regulatory bodies charged with the responsibility of controlling drug administration. Catalogue of drugs in a particular country is subject to surveillance from time to time and items deemed unfit for consumption by the authorities are banned. A number of drugs have been blacklisted because of their implication in certain untoward reactions, Dipyrone which comes in the generic form and other trade marks such as Navalgene, Novalgin, No algina etc. has been banned in some countries. This is because of its implication in agranulocytosis, a situation associated with reduction of polymorphonuclear leucocytes (white blood cells) necessary for engulfing foreign bodies. Dipyrone is an antipyretic/analgesic drug whose use has been recommended only in life threatening situation where other analgesic/antipyretic fails. Now, one question that lingers in the minds of many is whether dipyrone is absolutely banned in Nigeria considering that it has continued to enjoy mass importation and wide distribution within drug dealers and clinics alike.

It is still very much widely prescribed by medical practitioners. The professionals and the public in general needs a clarification on this issue from the appropriate authorities. If absolutely banned, then importation and prescription of such drug must also be mandatorily stopped.

In addition to prohibiting the importation of banned drugs, it is important that drugs entering this country through our borders and ports are timely intercepted and screened properly before letting out for public consumption. This would ensure that unfit drugs do not find their ways ridiculously into the present day open drug market, a situation which is hazardous to our numerous unsuspecting pa-

tients. A fake drug is one made in semblance of the real one but unable to elicit the desired therapeutic efficacy. Ordinarily, a drug might appear genuine but may contain just a little if any, pharmacologically active substance; an example of such fakery which is common in our markets today is a case of paracetamol tablet.

BY  
**JOHN ALFA  
UNN, Nsukka**

formulated to contain about 500mg instead of 500mg paracetamol per tablet. Such a preparation when ingested will not produce any tangible analgesic effect.

Another common occurrence is fake chloroquine syrup. This has been formulated by certain mischievous individuals/organisations to contain as little 20mg of chloroquine phosphate instead of 80mg per 5 c.c. The label claim of such fakes normally reads 80mg of chloroquine phosphate in 5 c.c. of the syrup which is false representation of the actual content of chloroquine in the syrup. An unsuspecting physician might give a paediatric prescription as chloroquine syrup 10 c.c. (1 teaspoonful) to be taken twice daily for two days. With the fake chloroquine syrup, 160mg of chloroquine phosphate initially then 80mg twice daily. After three days, this patient comes back to the clinic still saddled with severe feverish conditions because of gross underdosage of the prescribed medications which is unable to eradicate the Plasmodium parasite (Malaria fever causative organism).

In recent times, there has been an awful discovery where paracetamol is labelled as phthalysulphathiazole. The latter is indicated in some cases of diarrhoea/dysentery whereas paracetamol is analgesic and has no bearing whatsoever with diarrhoea/dysentery. Negative clinical response from such misnomer may create a confused state in the mind of the prescribing physician as far as the diagnosis and line of treatment is concerned.

Fake buscopan tablets are all over the place in our open drug markets today. Buscopan is an antispasmodic containing hyoscine-n-butyl bromide and a trade mark of Boehringer Ingelheim. The fake sample has been discovered not to contain any trace of hyoscine-n-butyl bromide when compared with authentic sample. The coating on the tablet is not firm and easily wears out. The bottle cover can easily be removed without tearing the aluminium foil which is not the case with the genuine buscopan packaging.

Administration of such drug on patient with abdominal cramps would not produce any spasmolytic effect. What is more worrying is that these tablets abound in the open markets and one wanders what the authorities intend to do about the appalling situation.

An adulterated drug can be described as one made to contain a mixture of the active substance(s) and some other components which may be inactive or having different properties entirely. Nigerian drug market is presently plagued with ampicillin and ampiclox capsules adulterated with baby food products such as NAN, SMA,

and the likes. The more disturbing criminal case is that of the antibiotics being mixed with substances which could be toxic systemically. A bottle containing adulterated ampicillin may have label claim as: each capsule contains 250mg ampicillin trihydrate. In the actual sense, the ampicillin trihydrate content may not be up to 5 per cent of the entire weight. Bacteria which would normally be sensitive to ampicillin will definitely not respond to treatment with such formulations.

The instances highlighted here present a clear picture of the menace to which many of our inebriated and ignorant citizens are being exposed to with the current wave of counterfeit and fake drugs.

The promulgation of a decree on counterfeit and fake drugs and the setting up of the task force thereof by the Federal Government is a

laudable decision. However, it is not just enough to seize suspect drugs, but rather, qualitative and quantitative analysis should be carried out on them to ascertain fakery or counterfeiting. When this is proved, the erring dealer/manufacturer(s) whether from within or outside Nigeria must be brought to book and prosecuted accordingly.

Such manufacturer(s) must be blacklisted forthwith. It is in this regard that one is calling on the authority to, as a matter of urgency, set up regional Quality Assurance Centres (QAC) for analysis of suspected samples. Such centres of excellence could be sited at the faculties of pharmaceutical sciences of the Obafemi Awolowo University Ifo, University of Nigeria Nsukka, and Ahmadu Bello University Zaria to augment any efforts of the Federal

Quality Control Laboratory at Lagos—in this way the taskforce would readily analyse suspected samples possibly at minimal cost towards a more efficient and effective services, and manufacturers who have hitherto made Nigeria a dumping ground for fake and counterfeit drugs would be on their toes. Inspection of Pharmaceutical premises must be objective, though and not withholding.

However, pharmacists as

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custodians of drug must be careful and selective in their purchases so as to avoid stocking of unethical products. Those engaged in manufacturing of Pharmaceuticals must adhere strictly to good manufacturing practice (GMP). By doing these, fairly good health can be assured to the people of this country.

# ELEMENTS OF NIGERIA'S ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY (3)

Continued from yesterday

It shows that there is need for us to know who are our friends and should make us respect in future international conventions and laws regarding sports matters. We hope the government would continue to invest in sports through provision of up-to-date sporting facilities and external training for our sportsmen. There need for partial professionalism as earlier called for in my previous contributions.

Our membership of various international organisations would be more respected if we give advice on how to make the world a better place to live and this cannot be achieved if sovereign rights of weaker countries of the world are not respected by the superpowers and their allies. The American invasion of Panama should be condemned by the international community, it has become necessary for America to immediately pull out of Panama.

The different and numerous foreign tours made by both President Babangida and Major General Nwachukwu should be used in enhancing socio-economic and political development of our country.

In the final analysis we hope the privatisation and commercialisation programme of the present administration which is an integral part of the new economic diplomacy would not be abused. We are afraid of a situation whereby individuals and groups in and outside Nigeria would be more powerful than the country, due to their new acquired wealth from the commercialisation and this cannot be achieved if those where the government does not properly monitor activities of investors, it might further lead to economic spoilsmen. There is need for bars might become security risk. Government must ensure that investments spread all over the country.

The government should encourage joint ventures. The joint venture for example in cement production between Nigeria and Benin Republic in Orléans, and the Save sugar projects should be boosted through increased production.

Indeed the equity debt swap programme should be properly monitored to make sure that over-payment is not made directly or indirectly thereby injuring the economy more. Efforts should be made to make sure that programme is not made to drain the econ-

omy. However one is happy to note that investors who would want to repatriate profits would have to do so after five years. Government must make sure that it does not relinquish its responsibilities in areas very vital to the survival of the country and the economic policy(s).

Those who want to buy shares in government departments must be provided with sufficient loans. While the peoples bank should assist in buying shares for the less

BY  
**ALITU IDRABIM,  
P. O. Box 11848,  
KANO.**

privileged in the society.

In our attempt to build a self-reliant nation government must continue to review its economic policies where there exist lapses, correction should be immediately made. As usually explained the foreign exchange programme is sophisticated and it depends on a country's productivity in the field of science and technology agriculture and education that is why the industrial world is not finding it so difficult to operate. The government must ensure the industrialisation of the country through proper investment in the education sector manned by patriotic Nigerians.

It is also suggested that the Naira should be protected from further drop, since our major foreign exchange earner is petrol, the proper exchange rate should be sought after all the oil trade is done in dollars, this would ensure better living conditions of the people. The leadership must continue to ensure that all government policies are implemented while those 'hazardous' ones are discarded. Indeed the welfare of citizens must be taken into consideration, this would reduce corruption and ensure maximum output from the citizenry. There is need for government to introduce new programmes that would unite the citizens this would reduce blackmail and sabotage of government policies and efforts towards economic revival and national growth.

Indeed the foreign policy sector in the past four years has recorded diplomatic victories but efforts should be made to record economic victories, since the present diplomatic thrust is for

economic revival and self-reliance. Efforts should be made by Nigerian officials to ensure trade balance between countries involved, moreover the prices of our goods and services should not be allowed to be recklessly tagged by some exploitative buyers.

Whenever Mr. President begins a state tour of America, he should tell the Americans and their economic institutions that there is need for cancellation of the debt of Africa and third world. This would accelerate economic growth of the third world. Mr. President should tell the Americans that our looking inward in the agricultural sector for example is intended to reduce the expenditure on importation of say rice and wheat, which is an integral part of the Structural Adjustment, America should not turn round to tell us that we need to buy more grains from them, basing their argument on trade imbalance. The issue of sovereign rights of individual countries should be discussed. Mr. President should seek for cooperation in area of external training and should seek America's assistance in the area of provision of technical teachers. American and their allies should ensure that apartheid is crushed. Apartheid is undemocratic and abominable.

Indeed the successes recorded by the present administration in the field of diplomacy would not have been possible without Nwachukwu's efforts, no wonder even the Nigerian Olympic committee through Alhaji Raheem Adejumo honoured Nwachukwu by decorating him with their emblem. He has been commended at several international fora by individuals and countries. We are optimistic that the new minister of external affairs Alhaji Itiwani Lukman is up to the task, his experience in OPEC should be used to enhance economic revival of Nigeria.

No doubt with a dynamic foreign policy and dedicated personnel and with the cooperation of the citizens and the international community Nigeria in years to come would truly be a giant of Africa, thereby taking its proper place among the comity of Nations. This would further make the country properly contribute its quota in socio-political and economic development of the world.

(INCLUCDED)