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Nigeria: Pfizer, Hewan Team Up Against Counterfeit Medicines

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14 June 2011

Counterfeit medicine kills! Don't be a victim. Take a closer look at the that drug before consumption!
Spread the word!

This was the message passed on to Nigerians from Pfizer Nigeria and East Africa (NEAR) to herald the 2011 World Anti-counterfeiting Day as part of efforts to checkmate the menace of counterfeit drugs and medicines on the health of Nigerians.

Pfizer which is collaborating with the Health Writers' Association of Nigeria (HEWAN) and other stakeholders as part of the mapping out of a blueprint for tackling counterfeiting in Nigeria, is utilising the short messages service (SMS) platform to drive home the message on anti-counterfeiting through the media and the Pharmaceutical Society of Nigeria (PSN).

Speaking in Lagos, Communication Director Pfizer - for Africa and Middle East, Mr. Ahmed Negm, said the idea is about letting people know what counterfeits are and why they need to take a closer look. "It is the beginning of a major project and we are looking at driving it," he noted.

Negm who spoke in tune with the World Anti-counterfeiting Day, urged the media not relent in creating awareness and education about the fight against counterfeit drugs and medicines. "You need to keep writing about counterfeits, just as we need to keep up the awareness creation. We need to do more conferences and produce more flyers to keep pushing the agenda."

In Negm's view, "Counterfeiting is a sophisticated market, even in the UK, we are still running advertisements. It's a global issue, and we cannot afford to relent."

Also speaking, Pfizer's Associate Director, Public Affairs and Communication (PAC), Mrs Margaret Olele said the company is setting up a working team on anti-counterfeiting with the media in collaboration with the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration & Control (NAFDAC) to set up a team for awareness on counterfeiting. "Pfizer is partnering with regulatory agencies, the police, customs, the media and the legislature among others to build capacity and pick out suspicious drugs. We are in tune to put up a submission with the global anti-counterfeiting coalition on deliberation on counterfeits." In a statement, Director, Regulatory Affairs, Pfizer NEAR, Mrs Bunmi Femi-Oyekan, noted "Counterfeits are deliberately mislabeled drugs to confuse people. They are widespread in Nigeria and across the world, and the trade is viable because of huge profit and minimal risk.

She said Pfizer is engaging with the media to help the public identify counterfeits. "It's a big problem as it is not always easy to differentiate genuine from counterfeits.

Sometimes the only way to differentiate is to do a lab analysis, however, there are certain tips that could help, not all are very sophisticated, but if people are aware, they could pick them up at the shop. We intend to collaborate with the media on promoting these," she noted.

Femi-Oyekan opined that Pfizer would keep organising regional conferences on counterfeits to facilitate collaboration among stakeholders and would continue creating awareness, training and involved in enforcement, helping the regulatory agencies, while working to secure their products, through authentication and updating of holograms. Established in 1998 by the Global Anti-Counterfeiting Group (GACG), the World Anti Counterfeiting Day is held every June 8 to raise awareness of the international impact of counterfeiting and piracy. It is a reminder of consequences of counterfeiting, such as revenue loss and consumer risk, are major issues.

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