Nigeria at the Verge of Destruction: The Role of Counterfeit Drugs.

By

Very Washington Opara.
Lecturer, Methodist Theological.
Institute Umuahia. Abia State.
washingtonopara2027@gmail.com.

Abstract

Counterfeit drugs or fake drugs are what can be called drugs that are not original. It is being produced by people who are not officially trained to be pharmacists. They produce these drugs with the intention to make profit not minding the consequences of their actions. Such people are wicked, and could be called murderers. Many have been maimed and millions of people have lost their lives because of this menace. Secondary sources were relied upon via Magazines, Internet materials, Text books, Journals and Documentaries. Some of them, especially the capsules and syrups, are filled with Samovita, Garri, or coloured water mixed with sweetened substances. It was found out that these counterfeit drugs do not have enough essential active ingredients to be efficacious, or are not found at all. Most of the places these drugs are produced are not fit for such business. This is because, these places are filthy that they become eye sore. The menace should be nipped at the bud so as to save Nigerians. To this, it was recommended that efforts should be made to arrest these drug barons, prosecute them. When found guilty, they should be imprisoned. If it means death sentence, it should be done so as get rid of this `epidemic` bedevilling the nation before she would be in oblivion.

Key Words: Verge, Destruction, Counterfeit Drugs.

Introduction

The menace of counterfeit drugs and contaminated food products in the world, and especially in Nigeria is quite alarming. It has become a global problem. Drugs and foods that are meant to heal, sustain life, have become a threat to life. Some have died, maimed and are suffering life threatening decease because of effects of these products. The dangers from counterfeit drugs cut across individuals (the buyers and users), governments, and the pharmaceutical companies that produce these drugs. Everyone is affected in one or the other. That is why all hands must be on deck to combat this nefarious activity.

Due to its global nature, the world is concerned. That was why there was a global Conference on this in Kenya in 1985, to find ways to counteract this menace: "In response to a recommendation by the Conference of Experts on the Rational Use of Drugs (Nairobi, 25-29 November 1985), at which the problem of counterfeit medicines was first discussed at the international level. WHO with other international and nongovernmental organizations set up a clearinghouse to collect data and to inform governments a out the nature and extent of counterfeit."(Counterfeit medical products: Report by the Secretariat)

here in Nigeria, the Agency responsible for ensuring that medical items and foods brought to the public is NAFDAC-National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control. It is its responsibility to monitor pharmaceutical and agricultural industries. It also regulates the

standard of what drugs and foods should be available to the public. ("Drug-NAFDAC" https://globaledge.msu.edu/global.resources/resource/10793.)

Verge: "To bend or incline; to tend downwards; to slope." (Vocapture Online Dictionary)

Destruction: "The act of destroying" (Vocapyure Online Dictionary) What is then destroy? According to the same dictionary, it is "To damage beyond use or repair." (Vocapture)

Counterfeit: this the definitions given by the above dictionary. "False,…intended to deceive or carry appearance of being genuine. Inauthentic. Assuming the appearance of something; deceitful; hypocritical." (Vocapture)

Drug: "(pharmaceutical). A substance used to treat an illness, relieve a symptom. Or modify a chemical process in the body for a specific purpose." (Vocapture) However, it can also be defined as "Any substance (other than food) that is used to prevent, diagnose, treat, or relieve symptoms of a disease or abnormal condition." (National Cancer Institute.www.cancer.gov.)

Counterfeit Drug: "According to the World Health Organization (WHO), a counterfeit medicine is one which is deliberately and fraudulently mislabelled with respect to identity and/ or source and may include products with the correct ingredients but fake packaging, with the wrong ingredients or with insufficient active ingredients." (Be Aware. Helping to fight counterfeit medicines, keeping patients safer.)

Another definition has it this way:

> A counterfeit medication or a counterfeit drug is a medication or pharmaceutical item which is produced and sold with the intent to deceptively represent its origin, authenticity, or effectiveness. A counterfeit drug may contain inappropriate quantities of active ingredients, or none, may be improperly processed within the body (e.g., absorption by the body), may contain ingredients that are not on the label (which may or may not be harmful), or may be supplied with inaccurate or fake packaging and label. (Counterfeit medications. https://www.ema.europa.)

To buttress the above, "Counterfeit medical drugs include those with less or none of the stated active ingredients, with added, sometimes hazardous, adulterants, substituted ingredients, completely misrepresenting or sold with a false brand name. Otherwise, legitimate drugs that have passed their date of expiry are sometimes remarked with false dates." (Counterfeit medications. https://www.ema.europa)

Since they "…do not pass through the usual evaluation of quality, safety and efficacy that is required for the EU authorization procedure. Because of this, they can be a health threat." (Falsified medicines: overview. https://www.ema.europa.eu.)

Counterfeit pills are fake medications that have different ingredients than the actual medication. They may contain no active ingredients, the wrong active ingredient, or have the right ingredient but in an incorrect quantity. Counterfeit pills may contain lethal amounts of fentanyl or methamphetamine and are extremely dangerous because they often appear

identical to legitimate pills, and the user is likely unaware of low lethal they can be.(Drug Fact Sheet. Counterfeit Pills. DEA.gov https://www.dea.gov PDF)

The Article is saying that this substance that is made to treat illness, relieve symptoms of illness, could be fake, not having correct active ingredients, or mislabelled to deceive the public. When this happens, especially in Nigeria, the result is that the nation is on the path of being damaged without remedy. The counterfeiting of drugs is on the increase that no day passes without those responsible for will not device means of achieving their selfish aim. It is a criminal activity for producing counterfeit drugs. This is because people`s lives are endangered in this situation. Most of the people who fall victim for this scenario "…are consumers who use medicines inappropriately or who seek to purchase medications at discounted prices." (The Real Impart Of Counterfeit Medicines.www.uspharmacist.com. 24-8-24)

Production: It may not be easy to pin point any country where counterfeit drugs are not manufactured. How are they produced? "They are usually produced in substandard conditions, labelled incorrectly, and may include dangerous, unapproved substance. There are no quality control mechanisms in the illicit labs producing counterfeit pills to ensure dosing is not lethal." (Counterfeit pills.) The counterfeiters also "…use cheap and sometimes harmful materials such as brick dust, sheetrock, and flour to create their bogus tablets." (The Real Impart Of Counterfeit Medicines.)

Counterfeited Drugs: The lists of counterfeited drugs are endless. However, this information will help us. The counterfeited drugs include "…expensive hormones, steroids and anticancer medicines and pharmaceuticals related to lifestyle,,,inexpensive generic medicines…medicines for the treatment of life-threatening conditions such as malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS." (Counterfeit medical products. https://iri.who.int/handle/10665/2121.24-8-24.)
Others include:

Anagelsic
Anaesthetic
Antacid
Anti-asthmatic
Anti-depressant
Antimicrobial
Anti-malarial
Antiretroviral
Cardiac
Cholesterol-reducing
Erectile stimulant
Hormones
Immune booster
Oncology treatment
Osteoporosis treatment
Vaccine
Weight loss
Wound healing. (Be Aware. Helping to fight counterfeit medicines)

Methods of distribution: Counterfeiters of pharmaceutical products operate in a way that sometimes one finds it difficult to notice, flexible in nature. Most times before a system would be developed, they are ahead of this so that such system will be null and void. This is globally because it is an organized system. They use `formal` and `informal` networking for the trade. Their methods can be seen in these ways:

Internet: This medium has in a wonderfully facilitated the distribution of fake drugs. "Increasing international trade of pharmaceuticals and sales through the Internet has further facilitated the entry of counterfeit products into the supply chain." (Counterfeit medical products.) Additionally, "Thousands of websites openly sell unapproved and/or counterfeit drugs, as well as prescription drugs without requiring a valid prescription, all in violation of federal and state laws." (The Real Impact of Counterfeit Medications) Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain lent credence to this: "The internet provides counterfeiters with easy access to consumers and markets" (counterfeit medicines advice for health professionals. FIP-International Pharmaceutical. https://www.fip.org PDF) One can equally add this to the thing: "online sales via internet market.

Shipping: Ships are also in this action. They are used to send these fake drugs to unsuspected consumers. According to OECD,

> …criminals are shipping packages containing smaller numbers of pills and tablets to try to avoid the more stringent checks which have become routine in many countries…falsely labelling shipments. In Argentina for example, more than a million unmarked Ibuprofen pills were seized after they were declared as sample items, and the united kingdom recovered some 150,000 powerful sleeping pills in shipments labelling as clothing, bedding and food, (Efforts to combat counterfeit pharmaceuticals. OECD https://www.oecd.org PDF)

They equally use courier companies vehicles, motor cycles; aeroplanes, canoes, passengers luggages, trucks, and any other means they can use to distribute and conceal their activities.

Why it Thrives

There are factors and conditions that make this evil trade thrive.

Globalization and Technology: The world becoming `one` village has helped in this trade. Technology has also facilitated the process. This is because "…internet provides counterfeit with ease access to consumers and markets….Technology to produce everything from label to active pharmaceutical ingredients available" (Counterfeit Medicines Advice for Professionals. Fip international pharmaceutical. https://wwwfip.org PDF) According to Drug Fact Sheet, "Distributors in the United States are selling counterfeit pills on social media, appealing to a younger audience that use these apps." (Drug Fact Sheet. Counterfeit pills. DEA.gov) One can stay in one end of the globe, and orders a drug without passing through the usual checks, such will be brought to him or her. In such situation, a novice may not know the genuineness of the drug.

Weak Regulation and Enforcement: Many people will have the `wisdom` to the divert and wriggle out of law especially when those who are responsible to enforce the have no moral and political to do so. With bribery and corruption, the traders always have their way. Corrupt officers of Customs and other related agencies use the avenue to enrich themselves and allow the criminals to go scot free, get off very lightly

. The criminals see the situation as a case with low risk, and plunge into it with impunity. Even though in Nigeria, NAFDAC is trying. If their efforts are effective, one will not be talking about counterfeit drugs in Nigeria. It still falls on the altar of some bad eggs among them.

Huge Profit: Selfish interest and gain has made the trade to thrive. Once one has succeeded in one transaction, the person has become a billionaire. Huge profit follows such transaction. This has led the players and those paid to assist plunge into it. If they succeed, money comes in. most times, people may not know the source, and they are being celebrated. This gives them the impetus to continue taking the risk. "Counterfeiting is primarily motivated by its huge profits and counterfeiters are adept at quickly adjusting to different contexts and products for which they can make the most money." (World health organization. Counterfeit medical products. https://iri.who.int/handle/10665/2121.24-9-24)

Ignorance: Many people due to ignorance, have been victims of these counterfeit drugs. And because they are ignorant, dealers feed on them and make the profit. However, how would they know since one may not know the difference between the genuine from the fake. Some of the people who deal on drugs, may not know even the difference. That is where the problem is. It is like, the blind leading the blind.

Unemployment: It is often said that an idle mind is the devil`s workshop. When some people (Youths and adults) are unemployed, the tendency is for such to fall prey to this phenomenon. Dealers will incorporate them as part and parcel of the business, or recruit such as their channels for distribution. At the end, some of them are caught and sentenced to imprisonment. "As a result of lack of employment, most youths are easily drawn to [this illicit trade], which do not stop at that alone, since they do not have skills to engage themselves productively; they turn to crime." (Ngozi Nwoke. War against illicit, fake drugs.)

Poverty: One of the reasons fake and probably cheap drugs are in high demand is because of poverty. Nigeria is experiencing poverty as she is breathing the air. The poor becoming poorer, while the rich, become richer. An average Nigeria cannot afford the basic needs of life-food, shelter and cloth. So, this economic downturn in Nigeria has contributed to this. When people have no money to eat not to talk of buying medicines, they resort to cheap and substandard drug to keep `alive` in the midst of tough economy.

Those Affected

Drug is meant to treat ailment, to cure diseases. Those who suffer for this non-curative phenomenon are vast. But the followings are the most affected. "…the most disturbing occurrence is the common availability of counterfeit medicines for the treatment of life-threatening such as malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. Experience has shown that vulnerable patient groups who pay for medicines out of their own pocket are often the most affected." (Counterfeit medical products)

Disadvantages

Counterfeit drugs/medicines endanger peoples` lives in many ways, yet people are bent to this trade that is criminal in nature. Many have died while others are maimed for life.

Death: To say that counterfeit drugs have killed people is just to say to obvious. Reports have shown in several countries all over the globe. A single report of this evil is not accepted.

…people taking counterfeit medicine may be putting their lives at risk. Estimates show that between 72,000 and 169,000 children may die from pneumonia every year after receiving counterfeit drugs, and that fake anti-malaria medication might be responsible for an additional 116,000 deaths. [It is estimated] that each year over 120,000 under-five-malaria – positive children may die across sub-Saharan countries due to taking poor-quality anti-malarials, including counterfeit and substandard pharmaceuticals….Rahmanet al …analysed 48 reported incidents in which falsified medicines caused serious adverse effects to patients. These incidents involved approximately 7,200 casualties, including 3,604 deaths. (Trade in Counterfeit pharmaceutical products. 7 Impact of counterfeit medicines. https://www.oecd.org PDF)

The above is a tip of the iceberg. It is also of interest to know that counterfeit drug contains over dosage of lethal dose, gives death certificate, it is dangerous.

Counterfeit pills that contain fentanyl can be deadly. A lethal dose of fentanyl is about two milligrammes, equivalent to few grains of salt. Fentanyl, similar to other commonly used opioid analgesics (e.g., morphine), produces effects such as relaxation, euphoria, pain relief, sedation, confusion, drowsiness, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, urinary retention, papillary constriction, and respiratory depression. Synthetic opioids, such as illicit fentanyl, remain the primary driver of the increase in overdose deaths, accounting for *80 percent of all deaths involving an opioid*. (Drug Fact Sheet)

Economy: On this, the effects are myriad. Think of somebody wasting hard earned money on something that is a wastage. What of those who are genuine manufacturers? The output of their productions is reduced thereby affecting the profit and effect may lead to disengagement of some workers sometimes they are being displaced these counterfeit producers and marketers. The government is equally affected because the life of the citizens is in danger when they procure false medicines. That is why it is said that counterfeit drugs affect the economy in these ways:

> Individuals who fall victim to low quality counterfeit products that may not adequately treat their medical needs. Legitimate producers, who can lose sales to counterfeiters, and need to take steps to ensure that counterfeiters do not infiltrate their supply chains, and to mount efforts to combat counterfeiters. Government, which are actively involved in managing health care in countries. Entire economies, in the form of the impact on crime levels, the environment and the possible effects on jobs and foreign investment. (Trade in Counterfeit pharmaceutical products)

Loss on economy on the side of genuine manufacturers could be seen in what happened in Europe. "The most recent EU Report on infringement (EUIPO, 2019) estimates that the European pharmaceutical industry was losing EUR 9.6 billion in sales due to counterfeits during the period 2012-2016, which represent 3% of total sales." (Trade in Counterfeit pharmaceutical products)

Continuing, what of the cost of security measures adopted by manufacturers to prevent fake drug producers from tampering with their products? Law enforcement agents most of the

time, are involved to prosecute culprits. This also involves money on the side of these manufacturers. Money that would have been used for things that would have benefited the company and the society.

> Incorporating anti-counterfeit technologies into their products and packages raises the costs for legitimate pharmaceutical manufacturers….The costs of introducing a unique identifier for manufacturers and parallel importers have been estimated by European Commission at EUR 50 to 320 million annually. These costs relate to adapting production and packaging lines and investing in software systems to upload the unique identifier information onto the repository system. The estimation of costs for the entire sector (including manufacturers, wholesalers, retailers and repositories systems) ranges between EUR 200 and 800 million. Firms incorporate overt, covert and forensic technologies depending on the risk and sophistication of counterfeiters; many also monitor their products in the markets of counterfeit-prone countries and conduct their own investigations into imported counterfeiting incidents….pharmaceutical companies have invested in security departments that work globally with regulators and law enforcement agencies. These departments collect 80% of the evidence used in criminal prosecution….(Trade in Counterfeit pharmaceutical products)

Damage to reputation: One of the things that make some manufacturers sale their product is their hard work and genuine products. But when these are faked, and could not meet the expectation of the public, their reputation is reduced and damaged. They cannot be trusted again. "…fake medicines risk damaging a firm`s brand and the products involved when those products don not meet expectations. Moreover, the firm`s reputation for safety and quality are put at risk, and the firm may be subjected to liability if consumers are harmed by counterfeited versions of their drug….((Trade in Counterfeit pharmaceutical products)

Undermines research: Research and innovation make a manufacturer to stand the test of time, make him successful. When a company spends money to do research, and comes up with a product, especially drug for the benefit of the masses, and such drug is faked, counterfeited, the moral of such company is lowered, the need to conduct research and innovation is undermined. There may be no need to invest in research and innovation.

> The impact of counterfeiting on pharmaceutical innovation can be particularly significant for developing countries [Nigeria inclusive]…. Infringement of IP through counterfeiting undermines innovation by reducing incentives to invest and innovate, and by depriving pharmaceutical companies of revenues, thereby lowering the amount of money available for further [research]…. (Trade in Counterfeit pharmaceutical products)

Environmental risk: We have only one world to live. Any adverse effect on any particular side, affects the whole. This, producers of counterfeit drug not take into cognizance. Their interest is to maximize profit. The damage and hazard counterfeit drugs cause to the environment, is imagined than realized. The air, water and the entire environment are affected, being polluted. The pharmaceutical companies are careful about the environment, make sure that it is safe for human habitation.

> While the pharmaceutical industry is required to meet environmental protection standards and reduce chemical waste and other hazardous materials in their production processes, the same does not hold true for manufacturers of counterfeit drugs, who can reap the financial benefits of dirty production by passing environmental shortcuts….Producers of illicit pharmaceuticals disregard the impact that chemical compounds may have on the environment, disposing of toxic dyes and chemicals without regulatory oversight, while ignoring the treatment of wastewater streams…seized counterfeit …pharmaceuticals are particularly difficult to dispose of in an environmentally friendly manner, as the core ingredients of fake drugs are in most cases unknown, hence the environmental damage they can pose is also difficult to asses…. (Trade in Counterfeit pharmaceutical products)

Loss of foreign investment: Business is meant to maximize profit. No businessman will like to lose in his investment. If somebody invests money for the production of product, and the same is faked, the fakers reduce his sale output and thereby reduce the gain, the business will close. If it is a foreigner, he will and goes away. In his country, he will inform his compatriots about his fate. Such information will scare them from coming to invest in such a country, thereby making such country to lose foreign investments. This is true because "The prevalence of counterfeit of medicines on a national market may reduce or discourage foreign investment, as potential investors judge that their interests will not be protected….The consequences may constitute significant lost opportunities for economic growth and development as well as for improvements in the national health scheme.(Trade in Counterfeit pharmaceutical products)
On Individuals: World Health Organization has also issued the dangers of counterfeit on individuals. These include

> Adverse effects (for example toxicity) from incorrect active ingredients. Failure to cure or prevent future disease, thereby increasing mortality, morbidity and prevalence of disease. Contributing to the progression of antimicrobial resistance and drug-resistant infections. A loss of confidence in health care professionals, health programmes and health systems. Increasing out-of-pocket and health system spending on health care. Lost income due to prolonged illness or death. (Trade in Counterfeit pharmaceutical products)

The above shows that counterfeit drugs are unsafe and ineffective. They result in waste of money and resources, harm to the patients, and may even cause their death. Treatment with fake drugs such as antibiotics can lead to emergence of resistant organisms. They can provoke "anxiety" (Counterfeit medications. https://www.ema.europa.)

How to Combat Counterfeit Drugs

Establishment of Task Force: The only language those who are involved in fake drugs hear is force. These are people who lack morals and hard-hearted. Preaching to them concerning their evil trade is a waste of them. They are interested in their profit with human health. The Task Force that must be set is not the one that will `assist` the trade. It must be one that have moral conscience and fear God. The Task Force will cease these drugs and burn them like National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) is doing in Nigeria.

Members of this Task Force will not hose who will collude and collaborate with fakers, and slaughter human life on the altar of lucre gain. This situation led World Health Organization to launch its International Medical Products Anti-Counterfeiting Task Force. (Counterfeit medical products)

On the global scene still, efforts are on gear in this fight. INTERPOL is one of the agents in this. It coordinates and targets internet sales of illicit drug and brings culprits to book. It has its connection globally to make sure that this business is halted.

> A number of initiatives are in place at the international level to combat counterfeit and illicit drugs, coordinated by INTERPOL….The operation targets the online sale of counterfeit and illicit medicines and medical devices…. [In its operation] which was carried out in 2018, police, customs, and health regulatory authorities from 116 countries targeted the illicit online sale of medicines and medical products, resulting in 859 arrests worldwide and the seizure of USD 14 million worth of potentially dangerous pharmaceuticals. (8 Efforts to combat counterfeit pharmaceuticals. OECD https://www.oecd. PDF)

Continuing on the international level, there is this MEDICRIME Convention. This is meant to provide countries with a model legal framework so as to know how to deal with false medicines and related pharmaceutical crimes that threaten the health of the world. this came into effect since 2016. (8 Efforts to combat counterfeit pharmaceuticals. OECD)

Information/Alert: Another way to combat this crime is to be proactive, informing and alerting the populace about the particular drugs that have been faked and probably the places where they are distributed. With such information, the public is armed and may not fall prey to these evil men. This led WHO to "…issue an alert to warn about the purchase of antiviral agents without prescription, including purchase over the internet." (Counterfeit medical products)
It is also necessary to say that NAFDAC has done so in Nigeria when a contaminated soft drink was noticed it alerted the public of this. It "…alerted the public of a batch of unwholesome Sprite 50cl drink circulating in Nigeria…the contaminated drinks have the batch number AZ6 22:32, manufacturing date of April 18, 2023, and an expiring date of April 4, 2024." (Doris Obinna. NAFDAC raises the alarm over contaminated soft drinks).

NAFDAC also alerts or warns manufacturers of food not to use dangerous substances in the manufacture of the products especially bread. The agency through its Director General, Prof. Moji Adeyeye said, " The agency warned bakeries across the country against using saccharine and bromated in bread production. [Anyone]caught in the act would face the full consequences." (Aidoghie Paulinus. NAFDAC seeks local production of drugs, cautions against use of saccharine, bromated in bread production.)

Anti-counterfeiting Devices: Like many manufacturers of other products, especially sealed ones, who make them with tamper proof devices to secure their products, pharmaceutical companies have followed suit. They now employ anti-counterfeit technologies or devices to secure their products. This is to ensure that their products on display are genuine and authentic. Some of these devices are holograms, colour-shift inks, and embedded codes,

images and dyes. With these, they will easily identify non of their own. (The Real Impact Of Counterfeit Medications.www.uspharmacist.com)

Destruction of the products: Another way to reduce the menace of fake drug is destroy the factory, or seal it off. This will serve as a deterrent to future fakers. NAFDAC destroyed Water production factories because of substandard production. According to the Director General, this is to ensure "…that what is brought to us [NAFDAC] at the point of registration is what is still in the market." (Aidoghie Paulinus. NAFDAC seeks local production of drugs) In furtherance of her action, she "…destroyed some fake and unwholesome products worth N1.367 billion in Abuja. The items destroyed [were drugs which included psychoactive and controlled substances…including drugs seized from hawkers." (Fred Ezeh. NAFDAC destroys substandard products valued at N1.37bn.) Most of the times, the seized drugs are burnt publicly. The agency is not relenting in her life-saving activities. Giving a score card on her activities the agency has this to say:

> [The] Directorate went on field operations and succeeded in mopping up falsified medicines…that could endanger the health of the people…the Agency officials stormed supermarkets in the big cities across the country…to apprehend manufacturers and merchants of fake drugs…`In November, the Agency seized N300 million worth of fake medicines during a raid of tyre village, trade fair complex, Lagos State. On Wednesday, December 11, the Agency destroyed expired, unregistered drugs worth N11 billion in Ibadan, Oyo State. (Fred Ezeh. NAFDAC destroyed N120bn worth of fake products in 6 months.)

Aim of Anti-Counterfeit Campaign

Life of the citizens is important to any sane and serious country. No government will allow the life of its citizens to be slaughtered at the altar of selfish citizens. Such citizens are enemies of their country no matter who the people are. So the government should do everything to see that the life of her citizens safeguarded and the culprits of counterfeit drugs punished, no matter whose ox is gored. To buttress this point, Director General of NAFDAC said that "…the goal was [and is still] to eliminate substandard, falsified…products from the supply chain, thus safeguarding the health of the population." (Fred Ezeh. NAFDAC destroys substandard products valued at N1.37bn.) She went on to say that their aim is to save Nigeria citizens from the harm these unscrupulous people will put them. Hear her: "These deceitful cartels aim to exploit and harm the unsuspecting Nigeria populace for economic gain." (Fred Ezeh. NAFDAC destroys substandard products valued at N1.37bn.)

Nigeria`s Scenario

Even though the actual figure will be difficult to find, the menace of counterfeit drug in Nigeria is endemic. "According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 20-30 percent of medicines in Nigeria may be fake." (Merchants of death in trillion naira fake drug business. Vanguard News,www.vanguardngr.com.) The information is quite alarming. This shows the precarious situation we are in the nation.

Taye Ogundiji was sick of malaria. He bought Maloxin malaria drug. The more he took the drug, the more the drug was inactive in his situation. He continued with the hope that relief

would come, but to no avail. Unknown to him, he had been fake drug that worsened his condition. According to him, he lost appetite and weight, felt dizzy and ache in his bones. He went to Hospital and was diagnosed with acute malaria. For two weeks, he was admitted and finally regained his health. He said that it was then that he was told that "…he was before now, taking a sham that would have killed him." (The Nation Newspaper. https://thenationonlineng.net.) This is one story.

The next is that of Janet who lost her life due to fake drug. She was a mother of two children. She was sick that would have been treated with genuine drug. She took fake malaria drug that was well packaged and branded. Once she took this drug, her condition changed within 24 hours, her condition deteriorated. She went to hospital, but it was too late. She died. Upon autopsy, it was found that she was on wrong drug that had no active ingredients but only a poisonous cocktail, masquerading as medicine. (Merchants of death in trillion naira fake drug business. Vanguard).

"Analysts and medical experts are also deeply concerned about the impact of fake drug on the health of Nigerians, stressing that counterfeit medications increase deaths from malaria, stroke, hypertension, asthma, cholera, and other illness prevalent in the country" (Think Global Health. Nigeria`s Counterfeit Drug Epidemic. www.thinkglobalhealth.org.)

In 2021, about 191,890 deaths occurred due to malaria globally. Nigeria accounted for 31% of the death toll. Fake malaria drugs contributed to the toll. (Punch Newspapers. Punchng.com.) "Also in 2009, 84 Nigerian children died after consuming contaminated teething syrup. In 2014, a child nearly died from fake antibiotic" (Merchants of death in trillion naira fake drug business. Vanguard).

From the above, the date rate must have increased with the activities of these killer- drug barons. Their activities are not abated. Almost every measure brought to checkmate them, is being thwarted by them and their collaborators. Nigeria in deed is in trouble and at the verge of destruction if nothing is nothing is done, and that so fast.

Recommendations

Synergy Among Law Enforcements Agents: This fight against fake drug will not be left in the hands of one agency. It needs cooperation among these agencies so that, together, this fight will be won in Nigeria. These agencies include the Army, Police, Customs, Civil Defence, Air Force, Navy, Local Vigilantes. Let them work together for this mission of eradicating this menace.

The Public: The citizens should also help in this fight. They should not sit at the fence, because, they will be adversely affected at the long run. The people who manufacture and their distributors, their activities should be made known to the law enforcement agents for action to save life. NAFDAC boss urges "…all consumers of NAFDAC regulated products to remain vigilant, and be aware of the drugs…they purchase, asking them not to hesitate to report any suspicious activities to the nearest NAFDAC office." (Fred Ezeh. NAFDAC destroys substandard products valued at N1.37bn.)

Receipts Obtained: Receipts should be obtained whenever a drug is purchased. If it does not work, the receipt should be sent to NAFDAC or show her the place it is bought. Armed with such evidence, NAFDAC will now track such fake drug and culprit punished, or the place being sealed to serve as a deterrent to others.

Prevention at the point of Entry: Fake drugs, most of them are imported into the country before they reach the final consumers. The fight should start from their points of entry-Sea ports, Airports and Land transport (Customs). Those whose responsibilities are to check the importation of goods into the country, should be patriotic enough to do their duties with diligence as to save this nation from counterfeit drugs.

Imprisonment/Death sentence: Manufacturers and distributors of fake drugs should be punished. The idea of god-fatherism should be jettisoned. They should be sentenced to life imprisonment, or death sentence if found guilty. This is murder in actual sense. Drugs are meant to cure, but instead of that, vital organs are damaged, drainage of finances and loss of lives.

Identification of fake Drugs: Pharmaceutical companies should intensify efforts to see that the identification of their products should be known, and cannot be imitated despite modern technology. Pharmaceutical Association of Nigeria should also help in this fight. It should liaise with pharmaceutical companies to fish out these counterfeit drugs in our domain.
NAFDAF Actions: She should continue her actions of sealing the factories where these are manufactured, seizing and burning the fake drugs, and prosecuting the offenders.

Works Cited

Aidoghie Paulinus. NAFDAC seeks local production of drugs, cautions against use of saccharine, bromated in bread production. *Dailysun. Volume 20 No 5643*. Monday December 9, 2024): 6. Lagos: The Sun. Print.

Be Aware. Helping to fight counterfeit medicines, keeping patients safer. https://www.whpa.org PDF. Web.

Counterfeit medical products. https://iri.who.int/handle/10665/2121. Accessed-24-8-24. web.

Counterfeit medications. https://www.ema.europa. Accessed- 24-8-24. Web.

Counterfeit medicines advice for health professionals. FIP-International Pharmaceutical. https://www.fip.org PDF. Accessed- 24-8-24. Web

Counterfeit pills. DEA.gov https://www.dea.gov PDF. Accessed- 24-8-24. Web.

"Drug-NAFDAC" https://globaledge.msu.edu/global.resources/resource/10793. 24-8-24.

Efforts to combat counterfeit pharmaceuticals. OECD https://www.oecd.org PDF. Accessed-24-9-24. Web.

Ezeh Fred. NAFDAC destroyed N120bn worth of fake products in 6 months. *Dailysun. Volume 20 No.5658.* (Monday December 30, 2024):28. Lagos: Sun. print.

Ezeh Fred. NAFDAC destroys substandard products valued at N1.37bn. *Dailysun. Volume 20 No 5677*. (Friday, January 24, 2025): 27. Print.

Falsified medicines: overview. https://www.ema.europa.eu. Accessed- 24-8-24. Web.

Merchants of death in trillion naira fake drug business. Vanguard News,www.vanguardngr.com. Accessed- 7-5-25. Web.

National Cancer Institute.www.cancer.gov. Accessed- 19-2-25.

Nwoke Ngozi. "War against illicit, fake drugs." *Dailysun. Volume 18 No 4965* (Friday May6, 2022): 14. Lagos: The Sun. Print.

Obinna Doris. NAFDAC raises the alarm over contaminated soft drinks. *Dailysun Vol.18. No5265* (Friday, June, 30, 2023): 5. Lagos: Sun, 2023):5. Print.

Punch Newspapers. Punchng.com. Accessed-7-5-25. Web.

The Nation Newspaper. https://thenationonlineng.net. Accessed- 7-5-25.Web.

The Real Impart Of Counterfeit Medicines.www.uspharmacist.com. Accessed- 24-8-24. Web.

Think Global Health. Nigeria`s Counterfeit Drug Epidemic. www.thinkglobalhealth.org. 7-5-25.Web.

Trade in Counterfeit pharmaceutical products. 7 Impact of counterfeit medicines. Web. *Vocapture Online Dictionary*. Web.

World health organization. Counterfeit medical products. https://iri.who.int/handle/10665/2121. Accessed-24-9-24. Web.