

THE COUNTERFEIT DRUGS ARE SOLD AT SH3M YET GENUINE DRUGS GO FOR SH2.8M

Fake cancer drugs in Mulago

BY CAROL KASUJJA

THE National Drug Authority (NDA) has warned of counterfeit anti-cancer drugs are being sold by conmen around the Uganda Cancer Institute at Mulago Hospital.

According to NDA, they were tipped off by a patient who knew how the genuine drugs looked like. After investigations, NDA found out that the fake drugs are being hawked in the compound of the cancer institute by well-dressed conmen. The conmen usually target desperate patients who are ready to buy anything to save their lives. The several tins and tablets are poorly labelled yet expensive.

The most counterfeited drugs are Sutent 12.5mg, batch number NC 1060 and Avastin 400mg, batch number: NC 2001. Both drugs have a February 2019 expiry date.

Sutent drug is used to treat kidney, pancreas, and intestinal cancers. It works by stopping or slowing the growth of cancer tumors. It also works by slowing the growth of new blood vessels within the tumor.

Avastin medicine is used to treat cervical, ovarian, colon, rectal cancer and cancer found

in the fallopian tube or lining of the abdominal wall.

"Cancer being one of the biggest burdens in Uganda, certainly anti-cancer drugs are on high demand. That is why some people are now taking advantage. We were tipped off by an individual at the cancer institute and when we carried out a test, we found the drugs were fake," Fred Ssekyaana, the NDA spokesperson, said.

Ssekyaana said without quality medicine which is intended to treat the patients suffering from different cancers, the disease will progress to severe stages and may cause disastrous effects.

"All the drugs we impounded were unregistered. What is sad is that these drugs are expensive each box goes for sh3m, yet the genuine one goes for sh2.8m. Conmen hike the prices by lying to the patients that they get the drugs from Sweden. We are advising patients to be wary of any unproven medicine, buy medicine from established pharmacies," he said.

Ssekyaana warned that any counterfeit drug leads to poor health outcomes such as drug resistance, treatment failure, adverse drug reactions, increased sickness and death.

"It also makes patients/

public lose confidence in the health system delivery and health workers making them resort to herbal medicine," he said.

Asked how the drugs come into the country, the Police spokesperson, Asan Kasingye, said as Police they would not know the fake and the genuine drug because their eyes are not trained for drugs.

"NDA has not asked us to work with them to stop these conmen. As Police we are not an authority of drugs. We have to work as stakeholders to deal with these ruthless people," Kasingye noted.

Dr Peter Ssendaula of Nyango Medical Centre in Nateete, Kampala called upon

people to have a keen eye while purchasing any drug.

"If people have started selling counterfeit anti-cancer, then there is no drug that is safe. We often think that if a blister pack of pills looks the part sealed in foil and accompanied by an insert detailing the ingredients and possible side effects and bought from a genuine pharmacy, that it will do the work, but we are always wrong. People need to be so keen on the drugs they buy these days," Ssendaula said.

According to NDA, there are no national statistics of people who have died because of counterfeit drugs, just records of frequent drugs seizures.

Counterfeit cancer drugs		
	GENUINE	COUNTERFEIT
	AVASTIN Registered manufacturers are Roche, based in Germany and Switzerland. Supplied only as injection for intravenous use. SUTENT Manufactured by PFIZER. Supplied only as hard gelatin capsules.	 -Claimed to be made in Sweden Astrazeneca 2014. Astrazeneca and Turbihaler are trademarks of Astrazeneca group of companies Astrazeneca Pty LTD Alma Road, North Ryde Nsw 2113 Australia. -Wrong spelling of Astrazeneca. -Presented as bluish-grey tablets. -Spelling of Astrazeneca in some places as Astrazenaca and group as group. -Presented as bluish-grey tablets.

Uganda Cancer Institute responds

Dr Jackson Orem, the director of the Uganda Cancer Institute, said the increasing number of counterfeits is because the National Drug Authority (NDA) lacks resources to monitor drugs that enter into the country.

"It is the responsibility of NDA to monitor credible manufacturers and people who bring in medicines in the country, but because they do not have enough manpower and resources fake drugs find their way into the market. They do not have people who can tell the difference between the genuine anti-cancer and the fake anti-cancer. The officers they have can only tell the usual fake drugs not specialised drugs," he said.

Orem noted that the NDA needs to get laboratories to do test for these specialised drugs otherwise many people are still being duped.