

Slap on wrist for fake drugs vendor called 'shameful'

Written by

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Oct. 1 (GIN) – Counterfeit drugs are a chronic problem in Africa's largely unsupervised market place. So-called anti-malaria drugs imported from India have been found with little or no ability to protect adults or children. So the recent release of a fake drug dealer with a mere slap on the wrist has infuriated some Ghanaians.

The wrist slap was for Samuel Tobbin, executive chairman of Tobinco Pharmaceuticals, who sold Gsunate Plus to treat malaria in children although the drug was never tested. He and an Indian co-conspirator were made to sign an undertaking on Sept. 26, 2013, not to import or distribute unregistered or fake medicines onto the Ghanaian market again.

"Just signing an undertaking not to import fake medicines to Ghana again?" a bewildered 'Frank' asked on modernghana.com. "So importing fake medicine is just punishable by signing an undertaking? This is a shame."

Tobinco's stash of some 100 drugs imported and sold by the company – including antibiotics and anti-malarials - was seized by Ghana's Food and Drug Agency in a sting operation. Of the 100, only 7 had been approved by the FDA.

Tobbin, named Marketing Man of the Year in 2010, allegedly apologized to the FDA for engaging in the act.

"Fraudulent medicines pose a considerable public health threat as they can fail to cure, may harm and even kill patients," the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime wrote on their website. "They include those with less or none of the stated active ingredients, with added, sometimes hazardous, adulterants, substituted ingredients, completely misrepresented, or sold with a false brand name."

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"Legitimate drugs that have passed their expiration date are sometimes remarked with false dates. Low-quality counterfeit medication may cause any of several dangerous health consequences, including side effects or allergic reactions."

The Eastern Regional branch of the Food and Drugs Authority, FDA, also this week destroyed some herbal medicines and candies worth several million Ghana cedis.

The items included expired drugs, soft drinks as well as medicines without laboratory tests, which were neither registered nor certified by the FDA. These threats to public health have led the international community to call for a stronger and more coordinated response.