

The Truth  *About Health*

Drug Giant Pfizer Cited For Illegal Drug Testing on Nigerian Children

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Pharmaceutical giant Pfizer Inc. has violated international law by covertly testing an unapproved drug on children with brain infections during a 1996 epidemic in Nigeria, according to a Nigerian government report.

The official report remained secret for five years in spite of inquiries from the media and attorneys representing the families of children who were subjects of the illegal drug experiments. The Washington Post, which first broke the news about Pfizer's Nigerian drug testing in 2000, received a copy of the long-unreleased government report last year from an anonymous source who feared for his/hersafety.

Pfizer's unauthorized testing of the unproven drug on nearly 100 children and infants was never authorized by the Nigerian government. Pfizer's experiment was "an illegal trial of an unregistered drug," the Nigerian panel concluded, and the Washington Post reported in its expose a "clear case of exploitation of the ignorant."

Approval Letter Faked By Local Official

An alleged letter of approval from a Nigerian medical ethics committee turned out to have been faked by the company's lead researcher in Kano, the report said. The former director of Nigeria's version of the FDA said the agency had been unaware of the experiment. He told the panel that he "viewed the conduct of the trial by Pfizer as an act of deception and misuse of privilege."

The drug used in the test, called Trovan, had never been given to children with meningitis, the report said. Pfizer also filed no records showing that the children or their parents were informed they were being used as subjects of an experiment.

Pfizer's tests were conducted at a hospital in the city of Kano, where children suffering from a deadly strain of meningitis were being treated by volunteers from Doctors Without Borders. According to Pfizer, its work was "purely philanthropic" to help fight the meningitis, measles and cholera epidemic which ultimately killed more than 15,000 Africans. The government report invalidated the company's explanation, saying that Pfizer physicians completed their trial and left while "the epidemic was still raging," said the Washington Post article.

When Pfizer's drug testing in Nigeria first came to public attention in December 2000 from the Washington Post article, it was met in Nigeria with street demonstrations, lawsuits and demands for reform. The article revealed the results of a year-long investigation into overseas pharmaceutical testing by several drug companies, showing that it was part of a growing trend to test unproven drugs on often unsuspecting third-world patients.

The report said the treatment of two children during the experiment represented unspecified "serious deviations" from the trial's protocol and concluded that those deviations compromised their care. One was a 10-year-old girl identified only as Patient No. 0069, who was given the

experimental antibiotic for three days as her condition deteriorated. She died without receiving any other antibiotic.

Rep. Tom Lantos of California, the senior Democrat on the International Relations Committee, described the report's findings as "absolutely appalling" and called on Pfizer to open its records. "I think it borders on the criminal that the large pharmaceutical companies, both here and in Europe, are using these poor, illiterate and uninformed people as guinea pigs," Lantos said.

Source: <http://www.alternet.org/envirohealth/37024/>