

Zambia to receive mobile compact labs to detect counterfeit medicines

To help combat counterfeit medicines in Zambia, the Global Pharma Health Fund (GPHF), a charitable initiative funded by the German pharmaceutical, chemical and life science company Merck, has presented four mobile compact laboratories to the Zambian Pharmaceutical Regulatory Authority (PRA) that is part of the Ministry of Health.

In this context, Klaus Boehm, managing director of Merck South Africa, recently met with Esnat Mwape, PRA director general in Lusaka. The so called Minilabs are part of a donation to the Zambian Health Ministry announced in February, this year. One Minilab is worth around €4 000.

"Counterfeit medicines are a serious threat to health care in many countries, here in Zambia as well. Currently seven Minilabs are already being used in this country, and each additional Minilab makes a valuable contribution to quality control of medicines", said Mwape.

Boehm added: "The mobile compact laboratories are globally unique for their ability to detect counterfeits quickly, cost-efficiently and reliably. With the Minilabs we can relieve bottlenecks in quality control for medicines, especially in rural areas."

Interpol estimates that up to 30% of all medicines in Africa are either counterfeit or of inferior quality. GPHF provides help in this context. The Minilab developed by GPHF consists of two portable and tropic-resistant suitcases that contain the means to detect inferior or ineffective medicines. It offers test methods to check medicines for external abnormalities, identity and content, and identifies 58 active pharmaceutical ingredients, particularly those in medicines commonly used against infectious diseases. The test methods include those for common antibiotics, anthelmintics, virustatics, anti-malarial medicines, tuberculostatics, and other medicines.

To date, the GPHF has supplied more than 500 Minilabs at cost, to more than 80 countries. More than half of these countries are located in Africa, and one-third are in Asia. The combination of a simple, reliable test set for onsite testing and a manual with detailed instructions on performing the test is unique. Merck continues to participate in external research with the aim of increasing the number of medicines that can be tested as well as to discover other possibilities for optimizing the Minilab. Training is also offered to ensure that the users are familiar with the test procedure.

For more, go to www.gphf.org and www.merckgroup.com/minilab

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