

It came as a shock to the public that about 1,500 tonnes of expired drugs were to be destroyed by the National Medical Stores (NMS) in a country facing rampant drug stock-outs, leaving many to die due to lack of medicines. However, as explained by the stakeholders, drug expiry is inevitable and if not destroyed, the drugs pose a potential threat to the public, writes PRISCA BAIKE

Starting early this year, the Ministry of Health has been involved in a drive to collect and dispose of expired drugs and obsolete pharmaceutical from 6,619 health facilities, Government owned and public not for profit.

The process is envisaged to create more space for adequate storage of drugs delivered by the National Medical Stores (NMS) and prevent the risk of public health hazards and relabeling as a result of keeping such items in health facilities for long.

Dr Diana Atwine, the Ministry of Health permanent secretary, says expired pharmaceuticals are a growing concern in the country that can also result into a threat to national security if not disposed properly.

"It is naturally expected that about 5% of pharmaceuticals

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in the distribution chain is bound to end up as obsolete or expired," Atwine says, highlighting that the last time such a massive exercise was carried out, was in 2012.

Currently, the estimated quantities of expired medicines all over the country are believed to be about 1,200 to 1,500 tonnes and they are projected to cost sh1b to fully destroy and incinerate them.

Why the predicament?

The most imminent question when it comes to the destruction of expired drugs is why a country that faces



An official taking stock of medicine at NMS stores in Entebbe. Expired drugs should be disposed of

rampant drug shortages and deaths related to lack of medicines ends up in such a predicament. However, as earlier noted by Atwine, it is an anticipated scenario. Moses Kamabare, the chief

executive officer of NMS, says drugs will always expire. "This is because NMS procures drugs based on forecasts to prepare for anticipated disease outbreaks," Kamabare says.

He explains that for instance, NMS can procure medicine anticipating that in a few months' time, many parts of the country may suffer from malaria. However, if they do not fall sick,

overtime, the drugs will not be used. Consequently, in a few years, they will expire and, therefore, have to be destroyed. "Otherwise, it would be fatal if we did not buy the drugs



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drugs to save lives



NMS CEO Moses Kamabare

and people ended up getting malaria and died," Kamabare says, explaining it is not a problem if it is better to anticipate a disease and stock up in preparation rather than having people die due to lack of medicines.

He also notes that some of the drugs expire because health workers do not prescribe them to patients,

leaving the drugs unused until they expire.

Is destruction necessary?
Kamabare says destruction of expired drugs is essential to the safety of the public.

He notes that unscrupulous people sell expired drugs, sometimes mixed with fake herbal concoctions, which poses a health threat to the

unsuspecting public.

"As NMS, we have been following up such drugs and destroying them to save Ugandans from consuming expired medicine," Kamabare says.

He notes that most of the health facilities had expired drugs, but had no funds to destroy them.

"We know they are a danger. When such medicines land in the wrong hands, it is not those health facilities that will suffer. It is the Government that will be accused of being negligent," Kamabare says.

The cost

Regarding the cost of destruction, Kamabare maintains that NMS is not using a lot of money.

"We are using little money. We project to have used sh1b by the end of the year to destroy medicines from all health facilities in the country," he says.

We are using little money to save Ugandans who would have otherwise consumed the medicines that had expired.

He further notes that this cost is very little compared

to the cost of losing lives or attending to patients who have been exposed to expired drugs.

The process

Atwine notes that a collaborative approach has been put in place between National Drug Authority (NDA), Joint Medical Stores (JMS), health ministry and NMS for efficient and cost-effective destruction of the expired drug destruction.

"We are utilising the existing NMS mechanisms for collection of the obsolete items from the various Public, and private not for profit (PNFP) health facilities across the country and have them incinerated," Atwine says.

She says obsolete Pharmaceuticals in Public Health facilities - from Health Centre II up to Regional referral hospitals (RRH) and PNFPs will be collected on return trips by NMS trucks during the routine scheduled deliveries for the viable medicines to these health facilities. The collected expired are deposited at NMS designated stores at Entebbe, from which the contracted transporter for the hazardous

DR ATWINE, SAYS EXPIRED PHARMACEUTICALS ARE A GROWING CONCERN THAT CAN ALSO RESULT INTO A RISK TO NATIONAL SECURITY IF NOT DISPOSED PROPERLY



waste collects the items under NDA supervision to Luwero Industries Limited in Nakasongola or any other facility licensed by National Environmental Authority (NEMA) for safe disposal by incineration or other appropriate methods. Atwine explains that expired drugs from PNFPs under JMS are delivered to a store allocated by the District Health Officers (DHO), from where NMS collects the items for transfer vide the above. All the drugs must be properly packed and accompanied with proper documentation indicating the product names, and quantities.

Way forward

Atwine states that the health ministry has also tasked the NDA with establishing

a rigorous post market surveillance system, which will ensure that all the medicines on the market, both imported and locally manufactured are closely monitored for safety, efficacy and quality, especially paying attention to expiry dates.

Kamabare notes that NMS will continue rescuing Ugandans from the danger of expired drugs through following them up, collecting and destroying them.

He, however, urges health workers to prescribe the medicines that they receive so that they can benefit the public and not go to unnecessary waste.

He also urges the public to be vigilant by demanding for drugs from the public health facilities so that they do not go to waste.



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