

Africa pays more than Asia and Europe for key antibiotic

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A global pill price survey has revealed that the price of a commonly used antibiotic 'ciprofloxacin' is beyond the reach of many people in Africa because of its high cost. Health Action International (HAI) conducted the spot check on 30 November 2009 to ascertain the full price which a patient would pay for ciprofloxacin, in the nearest private retail pharmacy.

Ciprofloxacin, is classified by the World Health Organization (WHO) as an essential medicine and is widely used to treat a wide range of infections including diarrhoeal diseases, sexually transmitted infections (STI) and opportunistic infections in people living with HIV.

The survey covered 93 countries worldwide, 22 of them in Africa. While prices vary across regions in Africa, the cost of a course of treatment with ciprofloxacin in Africa is higher than in other regions of the world. In Africa, the average price for the originator brand (US\$45.37) was higher than in South East Asia (US\$17.46), the WHO Eastern Mediterranean region (US\$36.47) and the WHO European region (US\$43.63).

The price of the originator brand in Africa was 16 times higher than the price of the lowest priced generic. In other regions, the originator brand was about 11-14 times the price of the lowest priced generic meaning Africa, on average, recorded a higher price.

"It is an outrage that in a continent where poverty locks many out of access to medicines, the price of an essential antibiotic used to treat a wide range of infections, is unaffordable to many which spells suffering even death for those too poor to pay", warns Gichinga Ndirangu, Regional Coordinator of Health Action International Africa (HAI Africa). He wants all essential medicines offered free in all public health facilities.

The survey established that the price for a course of treatment using ciprofloxacin vary significantly across Africa. While a patient in Nigeria pays US\$82.57 for a course of the originator brand, the same cost US\$10.12 in Senegal. Generic prices showed less variability ranging from US\$0.66 in Zimbabwe to US\$19.95 in Angola.

Tanzania had the largest brand premium with the originator brand priced at over 42 times the price of the lowest priced generic. In Senegal, the originator brand price at one pharmacy (about US\$10) was half the price as generics in two other pharmacies (about US\$21). Generally, generic prices were highly variable ranging from about US\$3 – US\$22.

HAI Africa believes use of low priced generics will improve access to treatment and sees further scope to reduce the price of the generic ciprofloxacin further. It wants African governments to examine access to affordable essential medicines through surveys that monitor availability and affordability situation and put in place policies that ensure patients benefit from lower prices and improved availability.

An interactive map on HAI website presents the results and show large price differentials across the world for this medicine see: (www.haiweb.org/medicineprices).

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