



PRESS RELEASE

JOINT STATEMENT ON INCREASING SPREAD OF FALSE SOCIAL MEDIA CLAIMS ABOUT HIV AND AIDS CURE

The National AIDS Commission (NAC) and the Pharmacy and Medicines Regulatory Authority (PMRA), pursuant to their mandates under the HIV and AIDS (Prevention and Management) Act No. 9 of 2018 and the PMRA Act No. 9 of 2019, respectively, have noted with concern increased spread of false, inaccurate and misleading information on HIV treatment, often circulated on social media platforms such as TikTok, WhatsApp and Facebook.

Recent joint investigations by NAC and PMRA, in collaboration with Malawi Police Service (MPS), have uncovered disturbing trend where some unscrupulous individuals are tampering with labels of known medicines which they later advertise as "Gammora HIV Cure", falsely claimed to be permanent cure for HIV and AIDS. These fake products are then sold to unsuspecting people living with HIV at exorbitant prices, ranging from K90,000 to K260,000 per purported dose. Such deceitful adverts, if shared and believed, have the potential to foster an environment that endangers the lives of many people living with HIV.

On 13th March this year, the Mangochi Magistrate's Court fined two women to pay about K2.5 million each for selling falsified gentamicin injection which they were advertising on TikTok as Gammora HIV vaccine. The two convicts were purchasing the gentamicin injection from pharmacies, remove original labels, and replace them with counterfeit Gammora labels.

In another case, on 13th June, 2024, the Mwanza Magistrate's Court sentenced a 32-year-old man to 15 months in jail for advertising unknown tablet medicines as Gammora HIV cure. A third case is pending in court in Zomba where a suspect is answering similar charges.

NAC and PMRA are reminding the public that there is still no cure for HIV infection. The current available HIV treatment involves taking highly effective Anti-retroviral drugs (ARVs) that work by controlling replication of the virus in the bodies of those that have been tested HIV positive. The public should note that taking the ARVs consistently leads to viral suppression to a level that cannot be easily detected by tests, hence, the rapid HIV test can come out as negative. Unfortunately, this result is misinterpreted by those who claim to have permanent HIV cure, who firmly challenge those living with HIV and are on ARV, to go and confirm their negative HIV status at health facilities after being exposed to their falsely claimed HIV and AIDS cure products.

The public, in particular people living with HIV and are on ARVs, are hereby cautioned against being deceived that the negative HIV test is a result of consumption of products other than ARVs. The public is further being reminded that the ultimate result of taking the prescribed HIV treatment consistently is to promote viral suppression. This does not mean the HIV virus has been cured but rather the person has achieved the desired treatment outcome, ultimately leading to healthy life and reduced transmission rate of the virus.

People living with HIV are advised to remain vigilant and always consult a qualified healthcare professional who can assess their condition, prescribe appropriate medication, and provide guidance on its safe use. Taking medication without a prescription can pose several health risks including harmful side effects or ineffective treatment due to incorrect dosage and/ or wrong medication; potentially harmful drug interactions, among others.

The malpractice, in addition to posing serious harm to the public, has the potential to undermine the efforts of legitimate healthcare providers and regulatory agencies to ensure the safety, efficacy, and quality of medicines for all citizens. Specifically, this illicit business has brought about the following challenges:

1. Clients are being administered wrong medication that does not match their condition, potentially leading to serious health issues, including death;

2. Clients on ART are being tempted to stop ARV treatment with the impression that they have found a permanent HIV cure. This may result in resistant strains of HIV viruses being developed which are difficult and expensive to treat. Infections caused by resistant HIV viruses not only pose a significant threat to individual health but also carry a high risk of transmission to others. If left unchecked, these resistant strains can spread rapidly, leading to a broader public health crisis. When contracted, these infections fail to respond to standard treatment, resulting in prolonged illness, increased healthcare costs due to the need for expensive alternative regimens, and a significantly higher risk of death.
3. Due to the adverse storage environment of heat and moisture that these drugs are exposed to, the drugs may expire before their indicated expiry date. Expired medicines are potential poisons that may trigger very serious body reactions that can be fatal to human life;
4. Considering that HIV and AIDS usually attract stigma, chances are that some clients, particularly those using the injectable version of the said Gammora HIV cure, self-inject or use unskilled people to inject them for fear of being known that they have the virus and as such they may paralyze their bodies due to damaged nerves. Further, unskilled injection practices and disposal of sharps may propagate further transmission of HIV

NAC and PMRA are, therefore, warning the public that it is an offense, under Section 25 of the HIV and AIDS (Prevention and Management) Act, to proclaim or publish misleading, false or inaccurate information concerning HIV and AIDS. Similarly, it is also an offense under Section 98 of the PMRA Act, 2019 to manufacture, import, assemble, dispense, sale any medicinal product or medical device which is falsified or substandard.

NAC and PMRA, in liaison with other regulatory bodies such as Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA) and Police will pursue all cases of false, inaccurate and misleading information on HIV and AIDS and bring all the perpetrators to book. Anyone with information regarding illegal sale or distribution of falsified medicines is encouraged to report to the two institutions or police for action. The public is further implored to ensure that they are not lured in any way by the sensationalized adverts on HIV and AIDS issues.

For media enquiries, please contact:

PMRA Public Relations Officer on 0885 313 011 or email at jjosiah@pmra.mw or

NAC Acting Public Relations Officer on 0999 331 716 or email at

mabedif@aidsmalawi.org.mw

Dated this 10th July, 2024

Signed.

Dr. Beatrice Matanje

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

National AIDS Commission

P.O. Box 30622

Capital City

LILONGWE 3.

Mphatso Kawaye

DIRECTOR GENERAL

Pharmacy and Medicines

Regulatory Authority

P.O. Box 3241

LILONGWE.

About NAC:

The National AIDS Commission (NAC) was established through the HIV and AIDS (Prevention and Management) Act No. 9 of 2018. In line with powers conferred by the Act, the NAC has a duty to ensure that information on HIV and AIDS is accurate. Section 24 of the HIV and AIDS Act empowers the Commission to accredit all information on HIV and AIDS before it is presented to the public.

About PMRA:

The Pharmacy and Medicines Regulatory Authority (PMRA) is a statutory organization established by the PMRA Act No.9 of 2019 to regulate medicines, allied substances and the practice of the pharmacy profession in Malawi. PMRA's mandate is to ensure that medicines and allied substances that are used in the country are safe, efficacious and are of acceptable quality.