



**PHARMACEUTICALS EXPORT PROMOTION COUNCIL**  
(Set up by Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Govt., of India)

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Dated: 11<sup>th</sup> August, 2011

## **Nigerians Receive First Payments for Children Who Died in 1996 Meningitis Drug Trial**

The first payments were made Thursday to Nigerian families who lost children during a 1996 trial of an experimental meningitis drug, and Pfizer, which had tested the drug, a new antibiotic, said it was “pleased” that payments were finally being made under a settlement reached two years ago.

Four families received \$175,000 each from a \$35 million fund created under the settlement between Pfizer and Nigeria’s northern Kano State, where the brief trial of the experimental drug, Trovan, took place. The four families had DNA evidence proving they were related to children who died during the trial.

In all, 11 children died in the trial: five after taking Trovan and six after taking an older antibiotic used for comparison in the clinical trial. Others suffered blindness, deafness and brain damage.

Although Pfizer said that only 200 children had been given Trovan or the older antibiotic, 547 families sued.

Despite having settled the case, the company still contends that meningitis, not its drugs, was responsible for the deaths and injuries, a Pfizer spokesman said Thursday. Epidemics sweep Africa’s arid “meningitis belt” on dust-filled winds during the dry season every year, and more than 12,000 Africans died of meningitis in 1996; in addition, the drugs in the trial were given only to children who were already very sick.

The company also said that Trovan had first been tested in 5,000 Americans and Europeans. Pfizer said Trovan saved lives in Nigeria, because 94 percent of the Nigerian children who received the drug survived — more than normally do if no medicine is administered.

Nonetheless, according to a 2006 Washington Post article, the trial’s certificate of approval from a hospital ethics board was forged, and Pfizer said its own investigation had proved that the

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certificate was “incorrect.”

Families of children who died or were injured while on the second antibiotic contended that Pfizer had prescribed low doses of the drug to make the results for Trovan look better.

The deaths and injuries of children during the Trovan trial, along with the dispute over the cause, first gained broad attention in 2000, when The Post published a series of articles that raised major questions about drug testing overseas. The articles touched off demonstrations in Nigeria.

The distrust of Western medicine that the dispute engendered was one of several factors that led many families in northern Nigeria to refuse to let their children be vaccinated against polio. (Other factors were rumors that the polio vaccine contained the AIDS virus or represented a Western plot to sterilize Muslim girls.) Northern Nigeria is still one of the world’s last remaining epicenters of polio.

Trovan was introduced in 1998 and became a lucrative product for Pfizer, but it was later withdrawn in Europe and restricted in the United States after the drug was blamed for cases of fatal liver damage.

Last year, a secret 2009 State Department cable exposed by WikiLeaks said that a Pfizer official in Nigeria told American diplomats that the company had hired private investigators to “uncover corruption links” to Nigeria’s former attorney general in order to pressure him to drop the Trovan lawsuits.

A Pfizer official in New York denied the accusation.

Source: The New York Times