

FATAL MISTAKE

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DEADLY REACTION: The boy developed a severe skin disorder

A 12- year- old boy who died after he was mistakenly given a fatal dose of wrong anti-retroviral tablets (ARV's) was buried last Sunday.

If only the pharmacist had listened to the HIV positive boy (name withheld) when he suggested that the bottle he was given was not the one he normally had, he would still be alive today claimed his grieving mother.

He was mistakenly given the much stronger Nevirapin tablets instead of the usual Combivir, which had kept him alive for years, during a routine monthly check-up on 8 August.

The distressed mother of the 12-year-old boy, whose medication was incorrectly changed, talked of how he was in good health although he had been on ARVs for the past three years. This was until he was given the wrong tablets by a “negligent” pharmacist at Baylor Children’s clinic in Gaborone, a few weeks ago.

“What makes it even harder for me to forgive the pharmacist is that my son had initially asked whether he was being given the right pills because he noticed that the container was different from the previous one. The pharmacist however assured him that the drugs were the right ones, just in a different bottle,” the grieving mother said in an interview last week Wednesday.

Twelve days after being given the drugs, her son was admitted to Princess Marina Hospital with a fatal skin disease known as Stevens-Johnson Syndrome. The standard four pupil’s mother said he suffered other symptoms that included psychosis and partial blindness as his cells were dying.

She continued: “The pills literally cooked him from the inside. My child died a cruel and painful death because of someone’s negligence in giving the wrong medication. As you could see in the end one could have easily mistaken him for a third degree burn victim.”

The Voice had visited the boy in hospital, about two hours before his tragic death, and witnessed his distressing condition.

The mother went on to say that although the clinic had owned up to their fatal mistake and the pharmacist had asked for the family's forgiveness, she was finding it difficult to forgive.

Relating the incident, she said that 12 days after consuming the drugs, the boy started complaining of itching feet and asked his mom if something was wrong with him.

"I told him that in our Setswana belief when feet itch, it's a sign that someone is going to walk a long journey or that he is playing too much. I really didn't think it had anything to do with his medication," the mother explained.

Fourteen days into the new treatment the boy woke up with his body and mouth covered in a rash, so his mother took him to a local clinic where he was given some ointment.

"He used it for three days and instead of fading, the rash developed into blisters, which was when I became suspicious that he was reacting to the pills," she said.

On closer inspection of the pills, the mother realized that although the label on the bottle indicated that it was the usual 'Combivir' the boy had been taking, the container was boldly printed 'Nevirapin.'

Worried, the mother rushed her son to the hospital where her suspicions were confirmed.

The boy's family has requested a post-mortem, but at the time of going to print the results had not been released.

Meanwhile the Ministry of Health and Baylor clinic have declined to comment on the matter and instead directed queries to Princess Marina hospital.

The hospital Public Relations officer, Kagiso Motsumi said the hospital was not at liberty to discuss the case. "In response to the e-mail dated the 31st August, the hospital is at no liberty to discuss the patient and anything that could have happened during his treatment. The family has not given us any authority to discuss the matter," Motsumi said in a written statement.