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Mali gets tool to detect bogus medicine

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BAMAKO, Mali, Dec. 31 (UPI)

A device introduced by Swiss researchers to the West African nation of Mali will detect bogus or substandard medicine within minutes, the researchers said.

The capillary electrophoresis technology, using thin wires hooked to electrodes to analyze a medicine's chemical properties, will weaken Mali's growing counterfeit medicine market, which most often targets patients with life-threatening diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS, the Integrated Regional Information Networks reported.

Until now, Mali's national health laboratory used a chemical analysis that was cumbersome and costly, Director Benoit Yaranga Koumare said.

Getting results could take a day, compared with 10 minutes with capillary electrophoresis, he said.

Mali's lab will use the device to analyze antibiotics amoxicillin and clotrimazole, prescribed for diarrhea and ear infections; the HIV therapy of lamivudine, zidovudine and nevirapine; anti-malarial quinidine; and the antibiotic rifampicin, to treat tuberculosis and leprosy.

The drug-testing technology -- used in Europe, Japan and the United States -- typically costs \$80,000. But Swiss researchers delivered a prototype to the Mali lab for less than \$7,000, said the Integrated Regional Information Network, an independent news agency associated with the United Nations focusing on humanitarian stories.

The University of Geneva donated labor and research costs, Serge Rudaz of the university's School of Pharmaceutical Sciences told IRIN.

Counterfeit drug sales worldwide will reach \$75 billion in 2010, an increase of more than 90 percent since 1995, the Center for Medicine in the Public Interest estimates.

Eighty percent of medicines sold in Africa are imported, the World Health Organization says.