

USAID Helps Ethiopian Airlines Protect Quality of Medicines Coming to Ethiopia and Other African Countries



Mr. Abayneh Tilaye of Cadila Pharmaceuticals demonstrates good storage practices to Ethiopian Airlines cargo staff during a visit to a company warehouse.

When is an airline a critical part of the healthcare system? When countries—such as Ethiopia—must import life-saving medicines.

As in many sub-Saharan countries, Ethiopia's emerging pharmaceutical industry has only a limited capacity to produce essential medicines to international manufacturing standards to meet local public health needs. As a result, the nation must import many essential medicines, including those used to treat malaria and HIV/AIDS and to protect the health of mothers and children.

Transporting medicines may sound simple, but it requires more than merely getting products from point A to point B. Many medicines are very sensitive to environmental factors, such as temperature and humidity, which can change beyond acceptable limits during transport in an airplane's cargo hold. To maintain and protect the quality of medicines, airlines must follow the standards set in good distribution practices (GDP) and good storage practices (GSP).

To protect medicines quality, Ethiopia's Food, Beverage and Pharmaceutical Industry Development Institute (FBPIDI) asked the Promoting the Quality of Medicines (PQM) program to train Ethiopian Airlines cargo staff on how to follow these important procedures. Ethiopian Airlines transports a major share of the medicines imported to Ethiopia.

PQM, which is funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by USP, has been working since 2009 with Ethiopia's health authorities to

ensure the quality and safety of medicines—especially medicines used to treat malaria and protect maternal and child health. PQM assistance focuses on strengthening quality assurance and quality control systems, to help maintain and protect quality from the time a medicine is manufactured until it reaches the patient. The President's Malaria Initiative (PMI) helps fund these activities in Ethiopia.

PQM's specialized training, held in June 2017, included 10 Ethiopian Airlines cargo service team members. As part of the training, attendees toured a local manufacturer's warehouse to observe best practices, reinforcing the concepts learned in the classroom.

Mr. Fasika Mekete, a PQM specialist in these procedures who provided the training, noted this was the first time ever that GDP training for pharmaceutical products had been provided to Ethiopian cargo staff. "This training is critical to protect Ethiopians who rely on these life-saving medicines, as improper handling during transit can impact their quality and harm patients," said Mr. Mekete. "And it helps other African countries, which also use Ethiopian Airlines to import medicines."

Ethiopian Airlines' commitment to ensuring medicines quality goes beyond participating in the training program. PQM recently visited the airline's new state-of-the-art cargo terminal, complete with a large cold-storage facility designed to safeguard the integrity of temperature-sensitive medicines. As part of its mandate to help strengthen Ethiopia's medicines quality assurance systems, PQM will collaborate with FBPIDI to work with the airline, in the event that additional training is needed.

The airline shared its appreciation with PQM Mr. Berhanu Kassa, Director of Global Cargo Sales and Services for Ethiopian Airlines, told PQM their guidance and training on best practices helped the airline optimize use of its new cargo terminal to protect the quality and integrity of the medicines it transports.

The Promoting the Quality of Medicines (PQM) program is funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by USP. The PQM program helps low- and middle-income countries strengthen health systems by building capacity in the regulation and manufacture of medical products. This helps increase availability of lifesaving, quality-assured medicines that are critical to accelerating universal health coverage, ensuring healthy lives, and promoting well-being for all people of all ages. For more information, visit www.usp-pqm.org.