Australia challenges 'misleading' Nurofen painkiller

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Australia's consumer watchdog Thursday launched court action against drug giant Reckitt Benckiser, alleging false or misleading claims about its popular painkiller Nurofen.

However, the brand disputed the allegations and said its range of painkillers complied with Australian guidelines.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission said Nurofen's products claim on their packaging, and on its website, to be formulated to treat different types of pain, when the active ingredient is the same.

The range consists of Nurofen Back Pain, Nurofen Period Pain, Nurofen Migraine Pain, and Nurofen Tension Headache.

"The ACCC takes false or misleading claims about the efficacy of health and medical products very seriously," ACCC chairman Rod Sims said as the watchdog launched proceedings in the Federal Court in Sydney.

"Indeed, truth in advertising and consumer issues in the health and medical sectors are ACCC enforcement priorities in 2015."

He alleged that consumers "have been misled into purchasing Nurofen Specific Pain Products under the belief that each product is specifically designed for and effective in treating a particular type of pain, when this is not the case".

The ACCC added that the retail prices were significantly higher than other comparable analgesic products which also act as general pain relievers.

In Australia, British-based multinational Reckitt Benckiser markets and supplies a range of consumer health and household brands, including Nurofen, Mortein, Clearasil, Finish, Airwick and Gaviscon.

The ACCC is seeking an injunction and orders for the publication of corrective notices, penalties and costs with the matter due to be heard on March 31.

In a statement, Nurofen in Australia said it was aware of the ACCC's concerns and disputed them.

"Nurofen disputes any allegation of contravention of consumer law in relation to its pain-specific packaging," the company said.

"All Nurofen packs are approved by the (Australian) Therapeutic Goods Administration and comply with TGA's regulatory guidelines."

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