

Advocates hold NYC protest over price of pneumonia vaccine

April 27 2016, by By Rachelle Blidner



Activists line up to put flowers in crib in front of Pfizer world headquarters in New York, Wednesday, April 27, 2016. The crib filled with flowers, organized by Doctors Without Borders, was delivered to Pfizer with a petition demanding that the pharmaceutical company lower the cost of the pneumonia vaccine. (AP Photo/Seth Wenig)

Doctors Without Borders protested the price of pneumonia vaccines Wednesday by leading a march through midtown Manhattan and

delivering a crib filled with flowers to a pharmaceutical company.

About 70 people walked silently and in single file to Pfizer's headquarters, where they placed 2,500 flowers in a crib as though laying tribute on a coffin. The flowers represented the number of children who die from pneumonia every day.

The crib was inscribed with the names of more than 370,000 people from 170 countries who had signed a petition for Pfizer Inc. and GlaxoSmithKline PLC, the two companies with pneumonia vaccine patents, to reduce the price of a round of vaccination from \$10 per child to \$5. Organizers then hauled the crib over to Pfizer representatives instead of handing them the petition on paper. Thousands more people signed the petition later Wednesday, the group said.

Advocates especially want cheaper versions to be available in poor countries and for humanitarian groups.

"Pfizer understands the importance of making vaccines available to as many people as possible," the company said in a statement. "Prevenar 13 is one of the most complex biologics ever developed and it takes 2.5 years to make a single dose."



Activists deliver a petition in a crib filled with flowers to Pfizer world headquarters in New York, Wednesday, April 27, 2016. The crib delivery, organized by Doctors Without Borders, contained a petition demanding that the pharmaceutical company lower the cost of the pneumonia vaccine. (AP Photo/Seth Wenig)

The company said it provides the vaccine to eligible countries at a deep discount.

"We continue to help address humanitarian crises through donations of Prevenar 13 to humanitarian organizations and are in active discussions with additional humanitarian organizations to determine if more supply is needed," it said.

Fifty-four countries are currently eligible for the deep discounts, according to The Vaccine Alliance.



Security personnel at Pfizer headquarter take a crib filled with flowers and a petition into the building in New York, Wednesday, April 27, 2016. The crib delivery, organized by Doctors Without Borders, contained a petition demanding that the pharmaceutical company lower the cost of the pneumonia vaccine. (AP Photo/Seth Wenig)

A plan to reduce the price in those countries to \$9.30 for a 3-dose round of vaccine amounts to a "paltry" savings; and a "vast swath" of developing countries, including Syria, Libya and multiple Latin American countries, won't be eligible, said Kate Elder, Doctors Without Borders' vaccines policy adviser.

A round of pneumonia vaccinations in the U.S. costs about \$465 per child, she said.

Nearly 1 million children die from pneumonia every year. That number could be reduced "significantly" by lowering the price of the vaccine, which prevents most but not all strains of the disease, Doctors Without Borders spokesman Francois Servranckx said.



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"It makes me sad when children die for reasons beyond our control, and it makes me angry when they die from diseases that are treatable or preventable," said Deane Marchbein, the president of the U.S. board of directors for Doctors Without Borders.

The medical aid group said Pfizer had \$6 billion in sales of the pneumonia vaccine in the last year, and the group has been trying to negotiate the vaccine price for the last six years.

Protesters converged on Pfizer headquarters a day before the drug company's shareholders meeting.

Last month, Doctors Without Borders filed a challenge to Pfizer's patent application in India, saying it would prevent companies from making more affordable pneumonia vaccines.

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