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Modi's proposed law on docs using generic name in prescriptions gets MSF vote

MSF said the unhealthy nexus between doctors and pharma companies encourages over prescription of expensive medicines.



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Moneycontrol News

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)/Doctors Without Borders, a Paris-based international humanitarian-aid non-governmental organisation, on Monday welcomed the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's proposal to bring in a law to make it mandatory for doctors to prescribe generic names.

At present most doctors prescribe drugs using their brand names.

"Bringing in generic name prescriptions will be a path-breaking step for the government," Leena Menghaney, head, South Asia at MSF Access Campaign told Moneycontrol in an email.

"It will not only benefit patients but the move will also strengthen public health in the country," Menghaney added.

MSF for years has been engaged in efforts to make life-saving drugs accessible and affordable to patients. The NGO, which was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1999 has been campaigning globally demanding big pharmaceutical companies to reduce prices of pneumococcal vaccine, hepatitis-C drugs and tuberculosis medicines.

MSF said the unhealthy nexus between doctors and pharma companies encourages over prescription of expensive medicines.

"Possible confusion or mistakes are reduced if all doctors use the generic name when talking about and prescribing medicines," it said.

MSF said to implement use of generic names in prescriptions would require a "major behavioural change from the medical fraternity which mistakenly associates more expensive brands with quality."

MSF said the government's proposed law should have measures to make sure that chemists don't take advantage by offering medicines that gives them highest mark-ups. The agency also asked the government to tighten regulatory systems to ensure high quality generic drugs.

"The only way to assess quality is to ensure quality raw materials (API) and conduct an audit of the production facility where the medicine is produced following good manufacturing practices - and that is something the state FDAs have to strengthen," Menghaney of MSF said.

"This regulation also need to be backed by the laws to ensure that chemists stock and offer the more affordable brands of generic medicines to patients instead of offering branded medicines on which they get highest mark ups," she added.

Last week Medical Council of India (MCI), the statutory body that regulates medical education and registers doctors, issued a public notice to all physicians in the country to prescribe drugs only by generic names and warned of disciplinary action against doctors violating the code.

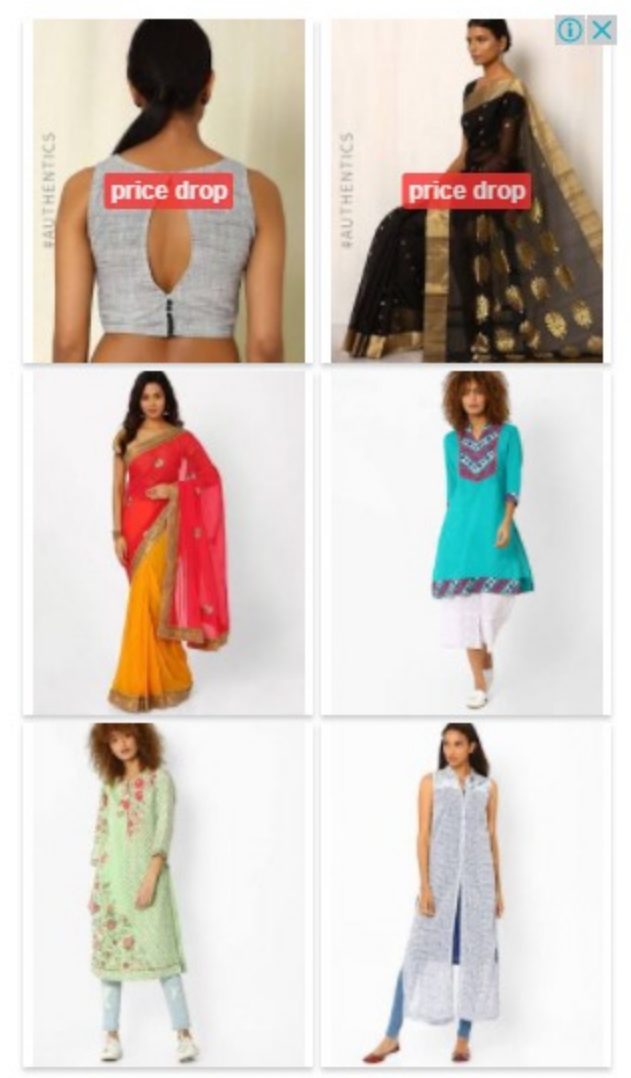
To make drug prices cheaper the government is including more medicines into the National List of Essential Medicines.

The government has also launched Jan Aushadhi programme, under which the government provides essential medicines at reasonable rates at specially established shops to provide affordable generic drugs to the poor.

Big Indian generic makers who are facing intense competition and pricing pressure in the domestic market are worried.

Around 90 percent of the drugs sold in the country are branded generics.

Industry bodies like Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance are concerned by the move on grounds that it empowers chemists over the doctor to decide which particular generic brand to dispense to the patient.



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