

Drug shortage at PHCs drive patients to private pharmacies

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BANGALORE: With the constant shortage of drugs at many primary health centres (PHC) across the State, patients have been forced to shell out money from their pockets to buy medicines from private pharmacies.

While doctors from various PHCs blame the lengthy procedure of drug procurement for the shortage, the State government reportedly has plans to address the issue. This shortage, however, has been haunting patients for over a year now.

Speaking to *Deccan Herald*, Dr T A Veerabhadriah, presi-

dent, Karnataka State Government Medical Officers' Association, said that the problem was predominant at the 24-hour PHCs located in some major districts. "Paucity of drugs much before the end of the year is not a new issue to deal with, especially for PHCs in Belgaum, Chikkaballapur and Tumkur," he said.

He added that the problem is not that severe in Bangalore as other government and private hospitals come to the rescue of patients.

For some PHCs, the upper limit for purchase of drugs is as less as Rs one lakh per annum, while for few others it is

about Rs five lakh, according to officials in the Karnataka State Drugs Logistics and Warehousing Society. "It is usually the PHCs with a lower allocation limit that face the problem of shortage. The procedure is tedious and it takes a long time to procure the medicines in between the year. This is one of the primary reasons why PHCs run out of drugs," an official from the Society said.

Problem denied

Dr Sridhar Murthy, who recently retired as Chief Supervisor of the Society, denied that the problem existed currently

and said that the issue existed a while ago as the tender was floated late. "For the year 2013-14, the tender was floated late. This time, for 2014-15, tenders are ready to be floated to ensure that such problems do not exist," he added.

Besides, he said that the State government was contemplating increasing the upper limit for purchase of drugs to Rs 1.5 lakh. The proposal has already been put forth and is awaiting approval, he added.

Dr Murthy said that a file has been prepared to ensure supply of drugs once every four months to avoid shortage.

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Miscellaneous.