

Metro buys minus prescription

Abuse of antibiotic starts at store

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Buying antibiotics over the counter in Calcutta is easier than ever, Metro found out within days of an appeal by the Indian Pharmaceutical Association to medicine shops not to sell without a prescription.

The association's appeal to the 4,000-odd pharmacies in the city had come on the eve of the 54th National Pharmacy Week (November 15-21), whose theme for the event was: "Responsible use of antibiotics saves lives."

The appeal came with an instruction to pharmacists to educate people about the harmful effects of unregulated consumption of antibiotics, besides refusing to sell them without a prescription.

Metro bought Clavam 625 (Amoxicillin and Clavulanic Acid), a broad-spectrum antibiotic used to treat respiratory tract infections and pneumonia among other infections, and Azithral 500 (Azithromycin) from half-a-dozen medicine shops in central Calcutta on Monday. Not one asked for a prescription.

Shoaib Ahmed of Chandni Chowk bought a strip of Augmentin 375, which contains the same combination as Clavam 625, from one such shop. The antibiotic, "advised" by a friend, was meant for his six-year-old son Isah,

BITTER PILL

- Lower than prescribed dose of antibiotic can lead to microbe developing resistance to that drug
- Overdosage can lead to serious side effects
- Increased cost of treatment in the long run
- Increased duration of hospital stay



who is down with cold and fever.

A pharmacist on Madan Street said he knew it was wrong to sell antibiotics without prescriptions. "But I have never been pulled up for it," he said.

Another sought to explain that he makes it a point to write the correct dosage while selling antibiotics.

But does he know he isn't qualified and authorised to do so? "I don't," he said with a shrug.

Rampant use of antibiotics makes microbes resistant to drugs, say doctors. It is also important to stick to the correct dosage and the course prescribed by a licensed medical practitioner, which rarely happens if one buys over the counter.

Pulmonologist Asok Sen-gupta said antibiotic abuse was a common problem across the world. "It leads to extended hospital stay while treatment cost goes up. Also, common infections turn critical," he said.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20

Misc