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Kerala will soon get drug price monitoring cell

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THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) will soon come up with a Price Monitoring Cell (PMC) in Kerala to ensure that there are no violations of price ceilings on drugs by pharmaceutical companies.

"This is an initiative of NPPA, which has written to all States seeking their opinion about the same. A few States, including Kerala, which has a severe shortage of regulatory officials have expressed interest in setting up the PMC. The State will provide office and infrastructure facilities while the staff salary will be provided by the NPPA. We have proposed that the PMC be set up in Kochi," the State Drugs Controller, P. Hariprasad, said.

7 States selected

Kerala is among the seven States that NPPA has selected for starting PMCs, based on several considerations, including the number of drug manufacturing firms and the approximate volume of drugs sales, he added.

NPPA is an independent body of experts established by the Centre in 1997. It is entrusted with the task of fixation/revision of prices of pharmaceutical products (bulk drugs and formulations), enforcement of provisions of the Drugs (Prices Control) Order (DPCO) and monitoring of the prices of controlled and decontrolled drugs in the country.

The PMC, though funded and supervised by the NPPA, will be functioning under the State Drugs Controller.

"NPPA has directed that we can hire two persons with pharmacy science back-

ground on contract basis as price monitoring officials. They will file their reports to the State Drugs Control department, who will in turn inform the NPPA," Mr. Hariprasad said.

Staff shortage

The Kerala drugs control department is at present suffering from an acute staff shortage, with less than 50 inspectors to check price and quality-related violations across the State, while the number of drug sale licencees runs into several thousands. Even though the regulatory officials do their best to conduct random checks and collect drug samples, they have been unable to check DPCO viola-

tions by drug manufacturing firms in a focused and sustained manner.

However, monthly reports from districts on DPCO violations are collated and filed directly to the NPPA as the State Drugs Control department cannot take any direct action against companies.

"We can only write to the marketing company, informing it about the DPCO violations found, asking it to withdraw its stock. We also inform them to pay up the excess amount to be refunded and the penalty directly to the Centre," he added.

Once the PMC is set up, all price-related violations in the pharma sector can be monitored better, it is hoped.

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