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CHEAPER TREATMENT

Up to 90% discount on cancer drugs

A pilot project launched at AIIMS Delhi will sell anti-cancer drugs, cardiac stents etc at a fraction of the market rates. Called AMRIT, it will be run in association with the public sector HLL Lifecare; the pilot was launched by Union Health Minister J P Nadda Sunday.

THE DRUGS RANGE

"Under the AMRIT (Affordable Medicines and Reliable Implants for Treatment) programme, we want to give medicines at an affordable cost. We have identified 202 drugs of cancer and cardiovascular diseases where the price is going to be reduced on an average by 60 to 90 per cent," Nadda said.

"In the same way, 148 cardiac implants will be given from the centre and sold here and their cost will be reduced by 50 to 60 per cent."

HLL chairman and managing director Dr M Ayyappan said, "To begin with, HLL will dispense 195 oncology drugs, 186 cardiovascular drugs and 148 cardiac implants through AMRIT pharmacy. Initially, the pharmacy will retail cancer drugs. By this month-end, it will commence the dispensing of cardiovascular drugs and implants in line with the cancer drugs."

THE DISCOUNT RANGE

AIIMS officials cited the examples of Docetaxel 120mg, an injection used in the chemotherapy cycle, and Carboplatin 450mg.

What	Docetaxel 120mg	Carboplatin 450mg
MRP	₹13,440	₹2,561.67
Reduced	₹888.75	₹1316.25
% Discount	93%	49%

ELSEWHERE LATER

The pilot project will be reviewed after 15 days and the government will try to replicate it in all central government hospitals, Nadda said.

THE CANCER BURDEN

7 LAKH Indians diagnosed with cancer every year, according to a govt statement

28 LAKH Indians estimated to be living with cancer

5 LAKH die of cancer each year

THE PRICE BURDEN

Because of high drug prices, nearly 50 per cent of patients stop visiting hospitals after two or three cycles of chemotherapy, AIIMS director Dr M C Mishra said. "Cancer treatment in India has been largely unaffordable for the poor and the middle class, given it costs Rs 2.5 lakh for six months of treatment. What's more, the cancer drug market is unregulated, riddled with high prices as compared to product cost. Retailers charge dynamic rates based on the patient's income group, offering marginal discounts. This results in most middle-class patients ending up paying 70-80 per cent of MRP."

GENERIC MEDICINE

Nadda visited the generic medicine store at AIIMS and said the government is planning to replicate this facility, too, to all central hospitals so that even if the doctors prescribe branded drugs, these will be "transferred" to the medicine's generic name and given to the patient.

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