

Telegraph, Kolkata
Wednesday 24th September 2014, Page: 4
Width: 29.55 cms, Height: 7.32 cms, a3r, Ref: pm.in.2014-09-25.19.7

Drug price reins off before Modi's US trip

G.S. MUDUR

New Delhi, Sept. 23: A government agency has blocked its own pledge to impose price control on more medicines by withdrawing guidelines that it had used in July this year to cap prices of drugs used to treat diabetes and cardiovascular diseases.

The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) has withdrawn the

guidelines issued under Paragraph 19 of the Drug Price Control Order that it had used in July this year to cap prices of 108 cardiac and diabetes drugs.

The guidelines are hereby withdrawn with immediate effect "in compliance with directions received from the government in the department of pharmaceuticals", the NPPA said in a statement.

Several industry bodies,

including the Indian Pharma Alliance, had criticised the NPPA move to expand price control to medicines other than the 348 listed under the National List of Essential Medicines. Paragraph 19 allows the NPPA to impose price control on drugs beyond this list of 348 in public interest.

Health sector analysts said the department of pharmaceuticals directive to the NPPA to withdraw the guide-

lines suggests that industry has been able to reach out and influence the government into doing something not in public interest.

"This is a government's betrayal of the people," said Sourin Rajan Srinivasan, managing trustee of ICoast Pharmaceuticals, a Vadodra-based drug manufacturing company. "This is also a government clampdown on bureaucrats who were trying to

use the guidelines to reduce the cost of more life-saving medicines."

The NPPA had indicated in July this year that it would also consider expanding price control to anti-asthma, anti-cancer, anti-HIV, anti-TB and anti-malarial drugs and vaccines.

"The withdrawal of the guidelines means Para 19 cannot be used anymore unless there is a public health emer-

gency such as a killer flu," said Srinivasan. "The interpretation of what is an emergency under paragraph 19 has not been accepted by the government."

The department of pharmaceuticals directive is also being interpreted by some public health specialists as an attempt to portray India as market-friendly just ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the US.

This effectively blocks NPPA's efforts to impose price controls on more drugs," said Malini Alsola, a public health activist based in New Delhi, who has studied drug price control issues in India.

"We knew the industry viewed paragraph 19 as a constant threat — it looks like the industry has influenced one arm of the government against another."

Princy.