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US doctors feel 'bitter taste' of Indian pills

SOME doctors in the United States are becoming concerned about the quality of generic drugs supplied by Indian manufacturers following a flurry of recalls and import bans by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). India supplies about 40 per cent of generic and over-the-counter drugs used in the US making it the second-biggest supplier after Canada.

In recent months, the FDA citing quality control problems ranging from data manipulation to sanitation has banned the importation of products from Ranbaxy Laboratories Ltd, Wockhardt Ltd and most recently Sun Pharmaceutical Industries Ltd. "I'm just beginning to realise the gravity of the problem," said Steven Nissen, head of cardiology at the Cleveland Clinic. "It's terrible and it is starting to get a lot of traction among physicians."

Quality of generic drugs raises concerns

India's drugmakers reject any criticism that their products are inferior to drugs made in other countries. "We have heard doctors making generalised statements without being specific on any product or company," said D.G. Shah, secretary general, Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance. "This is a deliberate and serious campaign to malign the Indian generic industry. Doctors are not in a position to judge whether manufacturing processes are correct or not. That is the US FDA's job."

"We are losing control over what people are swallowing," said Harry Leven, cardiologist at the Cleveland Clinic, who is trying to raise awareness of the matter among US lawmakers. "Now, when a patient comes in who is not doing well, the first thing I do is look at their drugs and find out who makes it." Indian physicians do not share the concerns. Narendra Saini, secretary general, Indian Medical Association, said, "How do I know that Western drugs are better than our drugs?"

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