

Post on Cong Site Stirs Up Frenzy Over Drug Prices

Pharma companies and Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance deny any increase in prices of drugs

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Mumbai: A post on the Congress party's website claiming steep hikes in the prices of life-saving medicines, especially cancer drug Glivec, has led to the social media playing it up and also creating confusion.

Novartis, which owns the patent for Glivec globally but excluding India, and Natco Pharma, whose generic version of the drug was also listed on the website, denied any price increases after a section of the media also reported it.

The price has shot up to more than ₹1 lakh from ₹8,500 for Glivec and to ₹11,500 from ₹8,500 for Natco's generic version Veenat, the post said without giving the drug quantity. It also showed modest to sharp increase in the prices of several other drugs.

"This information is absolutely false," said Adi Narayan, company secretary at Natco.

"The price of Glivec was revised downwards by 93% under DPCO (drug price control order) 2013 and remains unchanged," said Ranjit Shahani, vice chairman and managing director of Novartis India.

The maximum retail price of Veenat is ₹10,260 for a bottle of 120 tablets of 100 mg, according to

AWACS/AIOCD, a research firm that tracks drug prices from 4,000 chemists across India. Novartis sells Glivec at an MRP of ₹40,000.

The post on the Congress website comes two weeks after the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) revoked a price-cut order it had issued in July. The NPPA had included 108 cardiovascular and diabetes drugs under a guideline that allows the drug regulator to cut drug prices in emergency situation. The order had angered pharma companies who were still recovering from a new drug pricing policy introduced by the previous Congress-led government last year that had cut the prices of 348 drugs.

The revocation from NPPA of this new order has come after lobbies of Indian and multinational drug companies went to courts protesting against the move.

Imatinib, the molecule in Glivec and Veenat, is used for the treatment of blood cancer. Companies such as Dr Reddy's Laboratories, Sun Pharmaceutical Industries, Cipla, Lupin and Cadila also sell imatinib.

A spokesperson for Dr Reddy's said there was no change in the prices.

DG Shah, secretary-general of the Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance, also denied any price increase.

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