

# Spurious drugs: Govt wants fresh survey

ADITI TANDON/TNS

NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 10

Conscious of the expanding spurious drug market, the government has decided to order a fresh survey of the extent of prevalence of fake and counterfeit drugs in the country. The survey, to be conducted as part of the 12th Plan, will have a vast sample size to arrive at the most comprehensive estimate possible of the level of spurious drugs in the market.

The Health Ministry has until now been quoting a 2009 study of fake drugs, which the Central Drugs Standards Control Organisation conducted on 24, 138 samples collected from pharmaceutical retailers. Of these samples, only 0.046 per cent was found spurious. As for drugs of substandard quality, they make up around 5.6 per cent of the total drug market at any given time.

But these figures are clearly doubtful and need to be revalidated with a larger sample size collected from spots that are vulnerable to spurious drug usage.

"The old study did not cover vulnerable spots like government hospitals where medicines procured by state or Central agencies land, primary health centres which get free drug supply under the NRHM and remote areas. The new survey will concentrate on sampling from these areas to

## WHAT ARE FAKE DRUGS?

- Have no regulated manufacturing processes or batch records
- Ingredients can be changed any time
- Bio availability, environmental sustainability not known
- Ingredients can be different from those mentioned on labels
- Fraudulently packed to mislead consumers and make money on someone else's brand value



test the quality of drugs being passed on to common man. We are concerned that the new free drug scheme of the government may encourage intermediaries and law-breakers to manufacture fake medicine and make quick money." Bejon Misra, founder-director, Partnership for Safe Medicines, said today at a workshop held in collaboration with the Health Ministry and the WHO on the need to use technologies for detecting and tracking fakes.

The government is willing to mandate the use of such technology by pharmaceutical firms once it has evidence of the efficacy of detection of fakes. These technologies include alpha-numeric coding, bar coding and serialisation to enable the consumer to find out who the manufacturer of the drug is. Some pharmaceutical companies are using these technologies to protect their brand value but not for consumer information.

The use of these technolo-

gies is also rooted in their desire to boost the export potential. India's drug export business has grown from Rs 200 crore a year in 1970s to over Rs 40,000 crore a year today. Unless India assures international buyers of the quality or its stock, it cannot keep the experts booming.

"National and international pharmaceutical traders need to be satisfied about the quality of Indian drugs. Some people have expressed doubts. The new survey with a huge sample size will allay these fears," Drug Controller General of India Dr GN Singh said.

A correct estimate of spurious drugs in India is not available. Although some sections of the media have been quoting the WHO as saying that 35 per cent of the fake drugs produced in the world come from India, WHO India Representative Nata Menabde today clarified that the WHO never made such an assessment and the reports are false.

Regularly