

Pfizer, Ranbaxy tie up with ITC to sell over-the-counter products in rural areas

Our Bureau

Mumbai, July 11

Ranbaxy's pain product Volini or Pfizer's top-grosser multivitamin Becosule, for instance, may no longer be just an urban mainstay, and could well be available in rural markets, as well.

Drug-majors Ranbaxy and Pfizer have formalised an alliance with fast-moving-consumer-goods (FMCG)

company ITC to tap the rural markets for their over-the-counter (OTC) products. The development was confirmed by sources from both pharmaceutical companies, though

details were not disclosed.

While it is not clear whether the OTC products would be available only with chemists in the hinterland or the products would trickle into grocery and kirana stores as well – the pharmaceutical industry has been long advocating a formal policy for OTC products.

The three companies are reported to have undertaken a pilot project in Uttar Pradesh. Ranbaxy's OTC products include energy-supplement Revital, antacid Pepfiz, pain balm and spray Volini and cough syrup Chericof.

Ranbaxy's global OTC busi-

ness stood at Rs 248 crore last year, a growth of 17 per cent.

"Revital, the company's flagship brand, is now the 6th largest product in the Indian Pharmaceutical market," Ranbaxy had said, detailing its annual performance for 2010.

Pfizer India's consumer health portfolio includes brands such as Gelusil, Nebasulf, Selsun, Ferradol, and Waterbury's Compound.

However, it has globally sold its OTC brands – mouth-wash Listerine, cough-syrup Benadryl, skin-cream Caladryl and cough-suppressant Benylin to Johnson & Johnson.

The drug-company FMCG tie up is a "creative and sensible" decision, observed Mr Ranjit Shanani, President of the Organisation of Pharmaceutical Producers of India (OPPI), a platform of largely multinational drug-makers, and head of Novartis in India.

The distribution reach of an FMCG company into rural areas in India is much wider than that of a pharmaceutical company, he observed. The domestic OTC products market is pegged at over Rs 4,000 crore, growing at 12-14 per cent, industry sources said.

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