

Need to amend Drugs and Cosmetics Act 1940 to promote e-pharmacy in India

NEW DELHI, 25 July 2016: With the advent of e-pharmacy, there is a need to amend the Drugs and Cosmetics Act 1940 as it does not differentiate between offline and online pharmacies. The Government is seized of the issue and is working towards amending the existing law to develop a framework where the consumers are benefitted.

This was stated by **Mr. K. B. Aggarwal, Additional Secretary (Food and Drugs), Ministry of Health & Family Welfare**, while launching a report at a session on ‘**E-pharmacy in India - Last Mile Access of Medicines**’, organized by FICCI.

Mr. Aggarwal said that e-pharmacy would allow easy availability of drugs at all hours. However, there were concerns with respect to legitimacy of e-pharmacies, patients’ safety and privacy, misuse of e-pharmacy and adverse effect on retailers business.

He said that there was a need to create e-pharmacy guidelines which allow proper tracking and monitoring of sales of drugs, authenticity of online pharmacists and prescriptions, details of patients, thereby helping in reducing drug abuse and counterfeiting. He added that linking a person’s Aadhar number with e-pharmacy would ensure correctness of person seeking medicines.

Mr. Aggarwal said that for ensuring privacy and confidentiality of information, deliberations were taking place and soon the suggestions will be put up for further discussions among the stakeholders. He added that the DCGI was working towards developing its online platform and the system should be stable by the end of December 2016.

Dr. S. Eswara Reddy, Joint Drugs Controller, Central Drugs Standard Control Organization, said that the Government was working towards drafting a new Drugs & Cosmetics Act, 2016 to meet the current regulatory requirements related to safety, efficacy and quality of drugs. For the government, pharmaceuticals was a priority sector, therefore it was critical to ensure that its regulations are strengthened. He added that there should be a standard format of prescriptions.

In his presentation **Mr. Jayant Singh, Director, Frost & Sullivan**, said that e-pharmacy was one of the technology advancements that is about to create a huge demand in the upcoming days. There was a huge demand for access models that help patients and consumers avail the convenience of medicine delivery without having to leave their homes. With the use of technology and access to inventory of multiple stores at a time, e-pharmacies can aggregate supplies, making otherwise-hard-to-find medicines available to consumers across the country.

Dr. Manisha Shridhar, Regional Adviser, World Health Organization, said that for sale of online drugs, in the EU legitimate online pharmacies will have to carry a logo and India could learn from their processes and create its own logo for e-pharmacy. She added that there was a

need to work on Direct to Consumer (DTC) as with emergence of e-pharmacy many issues will emerge that would need to be deliberated upon.

In his presentation on the consumer survey, **Mr. Afaq Hussain, Director, BRIEF Market Research**, said that 90 per cent of the respondents were willing to buy medicines online as e-pharmacy brings with the convenience of ordering from mobile applications; all required medicines are available at one store/website; home delivery of medicines; better quality of medicines; better pricing and e-bill for tracking and reimbursement.

In his Special Address **Mr. Arvind Gupta, Founder & Head, Digital India Foundation**, said that there was a need to look at e-pharmacy sector in a comprehensive manner keeping in view the entire healthcare chain. He added that the Aadhar number should be integrated when a person seeks drugs from e-pharmacy to monitor drug abuse and its misuse. He added that there was a need to standardize labs to create digi lockers where the patients' records are safely documented for reference by doctors.

Mr. Prashant Tandon, Founder & CEO, 1MG, Core Member, FICCI E-Commerce Committee, said that digital tracking and monitoring will take Digital India forward. The Drugs and Cosmetics Act does not address many concerns, hence incremental steps were required to ensure access to quality medicines at affordable price. He added that e-pharmacy sector needs guidelines to function smoothly.

Dr. A Didar Singh, Secretary General, FICCI, said that there was an urgent need to nurture the e-pharmacy sector with the right set of policy frameworks and guidelines in order to provide the benefits that the sector fosters for the consumers. As one of the key agenda of the Government has been to provide easy, quality and affordable access of health services to the consumers, the evolving concept of e-pharmacy will definitely give an impetus to the health sector of the country.

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