

BOOSTER DOSE

Oral tablets a sweet pill for Hepatitis C

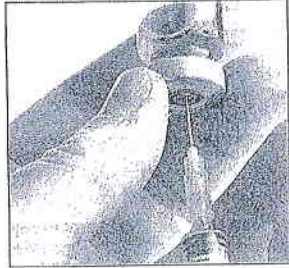
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NEW DELHI: New generic oral antivirals for Hepatitis C has come as a major relief for almost 12-million Indians affected by the disease. The prices are about one hundredth of that in countries like the US and Japan.

While one tablet of sofosbuvir costs around ₹30,000 in Japan, it comes for around ₹350 in India; For daclatasvir, the difference is around ₹10,000 and ₹135, and for the combination drug of sofosbuvir and ledipasvir, it is ₹40,000 and ₹500. The prices are even higher in markets like the US.

Sofosbuvir, daclatasvir, and ledipasvir are generic names of



Weekly injections have been the treatment for Hepatitis C till now

the medicines used for treatment of the disease.

Hepatitis C is caused by virus and can lead to cirrhosis, liver cancer and liver failure.

"Till date the treatment of

Hepatitis C revolved around weekly interferon injections, notorious for severe and disabling side effects. Now, new oral antiviral drugs are available in India at an affordable cost with almost negligible side effects and high cure rates," according to the Asia-Pacific Association for Study of the Liver (APASL).

"It is like saying the Crocin for Hepatitis C is here", said a doctor at the Institute of Liver and Biliary Science.

"The low price would also attract many foreigners to come for treatment here," said Shiv K Sarin, chairman, APASL.

The new drugs have a success rate of more than 95%, and the association was pushing the gov-

ernment to make the treatment free, as in the case of TB, he added.

Sofosbuvir is sold by Gilead Sciences under the brand name of Sovaldi. The Indian Patent office had, in January 2015, rejected its patent application citing that the drug was not inventive enough compared to a previous formulation. It paved the way for Indian generic drug manufacturers to produce a much cheaper drug, which in the US cost \$1,000-a-pill.

Natco and Hetero got the Drugs Controller General of India approval to launch ledipasvir+sofosbuvir combination and daclatasvir in the second week of December, while Strides Shasun Ltd received the approval to make sofosbuvir last Monday.

New drugs.