

CAPPING PRICES OF LIVE-SAVING DEVICE

Govt Warns of Action Against Stent Hoarders

Our Bureau

New Delhi: The government has reached out to drug and hospital regulators as well as pricing officials to ensure availability of coronary stents after the country's drug pricing regulator slashed their prices by up to 85%.

There have been reports of "artificial" shortage of stents since National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) capped prices of these life-saving devices this week, the ministry of chemicals and fertilisers said in a letter to the health ministry, drug regulator and National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority on Thursday.

Ministry officials told ET that those engaged in such practices will face dire consequences.

The ministry's department of pharmaceuticals (DoP) wrote to the health ministry secretary CK Mishra, Drug Controller General of India GN Singh and NPPA chairman Bhupendra Singh to remedy any instances of stent shortages following NPPA's price caps. "There are some reports regarding shortage of coronary stents in the markets/hospitals," it said.

ET reviewed a copy of the letter.

A coronary stent is a wire mesh tube used to unclog blockages in coronary arteries and prevent heart attacks. NPPA on Tuesday capped the prices of drug-eluting stents and bioresorbable vascular scaffolds at ₹31,080 and bare-metal stents at ₹7,623, including VAT.

DoP has requested the health ministry to take "necessary action" to ensure adequate availability of coronary stents at hospitals.

The health ministry has the power to make accountable hospitals and doctors found hoarding stents, a government official told ET on condition of anonymity.

DoP has further requested DCGI GN Singh to take measures against any shortages in stents, especially imported ones, using the help of state drug controllers, according to the official.

The central drug regulator, in charge of granting import permissions, can maintain the import level of the life-saving devices and take action against importers violating price ceilings or adding to artificial shortages, the official said.

In case of complaints of shortages by manufacturers, NPPA has been directed to take action using Paragraph 21 in the Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 2013, which allows the government to monitor the production and availability of drugs and devices under price control.

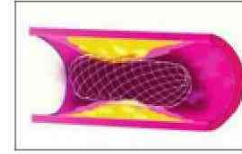
It can take action in case companies discontinue stents without six months' advance notice and also direct companies to continue supply for at least a year from when they disclose their intent to discontinue the product.

"We are taking up this issue with health ministry and others. Strict action would be taken against violators," said Jai Priye Prakash, department of pharmaceuticals secretary.

He said the government would also use various provisions of the Essential Commodities Act to penalise those found illegally and unethically profiteering or hoarding stents. In some cases, violators could also be blacklisted, Prakash said.

The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority, on its part, said it has written to all the "chief secretaries" to ensure compliance to its ceiling prices for stents and uninterrupted availability of these devices and cardiac care services.

"The government has taken all steps to ensure that stent price capping benefits are passed on to the patients and no artificial shortage created," it said.



DoP has written to health secretary, Drug Controller General of India and NPPA chairman to remedy any instances of stent shortages