

# Institutes overcharged for blood in 2014, no action yet

## RTI Reveals FDA, State Council Sparring Over Jurisdiction

Sumitra.Debroy  
@timesgroup.com

**Mumbai:** Over a year after the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) found that most leading private hospitals were charging exorbitant rates for blood and its components, not one has faced any action. An RTI has now revealed how two state departments—FDA and State Blood Transfusion Council (SBTC)—are sparring over who will act on the report.

Around 72 out of the 304 blood banks surveyed across the state in November 2014, were found to charge three to five times of stipulated rates for blood and its components, such as red blood cells, fresh frozen plasma and platelets.

An inquiry was carried out by the FDA on blood banks attached to Prince Aly Khan, Bombay, Jaslok, Cumballa Hill, PD Hinduja, SL Raheja, Lilavati, Asian Heart Institute, Fortis, Kokilaben Ambani and Seven-hills hospitals. Standalone blood banks such as Manas Serological Institute, Suburban and Doshi Memorial Charitable trust were also told to explain why they were overcharging despite a national blood policy

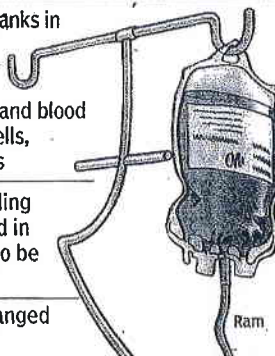
### IRREGULARITIES FDA FOUND

> The FDA surveyed 309 blood banks in Maharashtra in November 2014

> It found 23% of them were blatantly overcharging for blood and blood components such as red blood cells, fresh frozen plasma and platelets

> Of the 59 blood banks, including private and charitable, surveyed in Mumbai, 19 (32%) were found to be overcharging patients

> The extent of overcharging ranged from ₹50 to ₹2,000



### PROCESSING CHARGES FOR KEY COMPONENTS

Blood Component	Approved Charge (₹/unit)	Charge in Hospitals, Blood Banks (in ₹)
Whole Blood	1,450	1,700-2,250
Red Blood Cells	1,450	1,600-3,430
Fresh Frozen Plasma	400	550-1,060
Platelets	400	700-1,700

clearly specifying the rates.

An FDA official said only a handful of hospitals, including Kokilaben, PD Hinduja, Lilavati, SL Raheja and Jaslok, could explain their rates and were subsequently cleared of charges. The FDA wrote multiple times about the other hospitals and blood banks to the SBTC, asking it to initiate action.

“We sent multiple communications to the SBTC but are yet to get any response,” said O S Sadhvani, joint commissioner, FDA. “We do not have the jurisdiction to act on blood

banks. We had suggested the SBTC suspend or cancel its no-objection certificates, based on which we can suspend or cancel their licences, but nothing has moved so far,” he added. Sadhvani said all blood banks in the city currently charge as per the government norms.

Even the public health department seems to have forgiven the erring blood banks. “All of them have given to us in writing that they will abide by the government rates. But if there are any fresh complaints, we will surely investigate,” said Dr

Satish Pawar, head of directorate of health services.

However, the response to the RTI on the extent of overcharging brought forth alarming facts from the FDA survey. The findings showed how certain hospitals were looting deluxe and first-class patients. A leading south Mumbai hospital, for instance, was charging its second-class and deluxe pa-

### TIMES VIEW:

Overcharging is a crime against consumers, whatever be the article on sale, but fleeing people looking for blood in emergency situations is unpardonable. The FDA seems to have missed the bus as its survey would have alerted the guilty hospitals. Who will wait for a year for the FDA to act?

tients Rs 1,000 and Rs 1,500 respectively for platelets when the amount fixed by the government is Rs 400. In most places, whole blood to white blood cells were being sold at twice or thrice the specified amount.

The RTI applicant who did not wish to be named said, “It is unfortunate that the government has allowed most hospitals and blood banks to bail out by simply correcting their rates. What about the fact that they have illegally fleeced patients all these years? There has to be some deterrent.”

Regulatory