

Cancer drug for rich western patients, not Indians: Bayer CEO

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Global medical charity Medecins Sans Frontieres slammed on Friday a statement by Bayer's chief executive officer that the giant German firm developed its cancer drug Nexavar for people who could afford the medicine, not "for Indians".

India's controller general of patents angered Bayer in March 2012 when he authorised a local drug-maker to produce a generic copy of Nexavar, saying the German company charged a price that was too costly for most Indians.

"We did not develop this medicine (Nexavar) for Indians," CEO Marijn Dekkers said at a little reported pharmaceutical forum last month, according to the January 21st edition of Businessweek.

"We developed it for western patients who can afford it," Dekkers said, and called the Indian regulator's action "essentially theft".

Bayer said the statements attributed to Dekkers were accurate and forwarded written comments made later by the German chief executive seeking to explain his remarks.

Dekkers said the comment had been a "quick response" at the industry forum to the Nexavar issue and added Bayer wants "all people to share the fruit of medical progress regardless of their origins or income".

But Dekkers added in the written comments he had

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Manica Balasegaram,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF MSF'S ACCESS CAMPAIGN

been "particularly frustrated" by the Indian regulator's decision, which marked the first time a so-called compulsory licence of a patented drug had been awarded in India. Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) said on Friday that the Bayer chief's remarks summed up "everything that is wrong" with the multinational pharmaceutical industry.

"Bayer is effectively admitting the drugs they develop are deliberately going to be rationed to the wealthiest patients," Manica Balasegaram, executive director of MSF's Access Campaign, said.

The medical charity said big pharmaceutical companies believe "research and development (R&D) can only be rewarded by a patent and through high prices to recoup the R&D costs. "Those who can't afford to pay are basically cut out of the system," Balasegaram said.

The Indian government gave local pharmaceutical house Natco Pharma a licence to produce a copy of Nexavar, used to treat liver and kidney cancer, at a 97% discount to the original selling price of the Bayer product in India. — AFP

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