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Med bills must show price cap

The government, in an attempt to empower consumers and save them from paying more for medicines, is set to make it mandatory for chemists to mention in the bill whether they are selling a price-controlled product or not.

Besides, the bill will also mention price of medicine as capped by the government.

This will enable a consumer to make an informed choice while also checking that maximum retail price (MRP) of a scheduled or price-controlled product is not more than that fixed by the government.

The Rs 88,000-crore Indian pharmaceutical market is highly fragmented and comparable medicine formulations are available under different brands.

At present, the medicine invoice contains the name of medicine, pack size, batch number and MRP. While consumers depend on doctor's prescription and chemist's dispensation, in the absence of a robust market monitoring mechanism, companies often overcharge consumers on various medicines, often by tweaking the combination or packaging it differently.



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The latest proposal by National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority is aimed at making consumers more aware while allowing them the choice of buying cheaper medicines. "This will enable the consumer to know whether the medicine purchased by him/her is a scheduled medicine or non-scheduled medicine and in case it is a scheduled medicine, he/she can verify whether MRP is within or exceeding the ceiling price plus applicable local taxes; and in case of the latter, he can file a complaint with NPPA for initiating necessary action against all concerned under DPCO 2013 and the Essential Commodities Act, 1955," the regulator said.

Initially, NPPA had proposed that medicine packs should carry an identification mark or strip to distinguish between price-controlled and unscheduled medicines. However, pharmaceutical companies and industry bodies opposed this, saying it would create confusion for the consumer as already there was a lot of information on the pack. Besides, this would have meant incurring an additional packaging cost for drug manufacturers. NPPA is expected to meet pharmaceutical retailers to discuss the new proposal.