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Drug price watchdog in states?

The government plans to spread its regulatory wings to keep medicine prices under stringent check in every nook and corner of the country and save consumers from paying more.

It is working to set up drug price monitoring cells across the country to keep a close watch on real-time price movements, the maximum retail price of medicines and their availability , a senior official said.

The government feels merely bringing drugs under price control will not help consumers unless compliance is ensured. Therefore, it is imperative to have a watchdog in the local market where the trade takes place, the official told TOI.

At present there is National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority , regulating prices of medicines and also monitoring compliance along with availability .

However, in the absence of adequate field inspectors and physical proximity , the central regulator finds it difficult to keep a routine watch. “We are coordinating with state governments and state drug controllers to set up price monitoring cells with field inspectors in the local market. This will enable routine market inspection and assessment of the market place on a real time basis,” the official said.

NPPA, which will continue to be the central wing and play a pivotal role in co-ordination with state agencies, has started holding meetings with various state officials to kick start the project. According to another official from NPPA, work in the direction has started in states like Rajasthan, Karnataka and Maharashtra.

The government plans to make a start from metropolitan cities and states where the presence of pharmaceutical companies is more. Centre also plans to share the finances for the project.

While states may have to provide space for setting up these monitoring agencies, the Centre is likely to allocate funds to bear expenditure on infrastructure.