

PHFI report terms drug policy as directionless

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Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI) and The Institute for Studies in Industrial Development (ISID) organised the first ever Conference on "Pharmaceutical Policies in India: Balancing Industrial and Public Health Interests" on March 06, 2014 at its Vasant Kunj campus, in New Delhi. The objective of the Conference was to share knowledge on health and industrial policy among academicians, civil societies, government as well as industrial stakeholders and capacity building of young researchers in the field of pharmaco-economics, that will have plenary and technical sessions with a focus on industrial policy-health interface.

Amongst the notable highlights was the release two reports on 'Access to Medicines' and 'Drug Price Ceilings'. The report on Access to Medicines discusses in great detail the current scenario in India with respect to access to medicines and highlights the various factors responsible for the dismal situation while at the same time proposing viable policy options to deal with the problem at hand. Similarly the report on Drug Price Ceilings is a comprehensive and independent evaluation of the drug price order recently implemented by the government, using market based price control mechanism, which ultimately benefited the drugmakers from a policy muddle that was directionless.

The first report, 'Access to medicine in India' mentions that India is currently referred to as the 'pharmacy of the global south', but ironically, access to medicines for a large majority of Indians is impeded by the lack of financial risk protection and an inefficient and ineffective drug procurement and distribution system. Seventy percent of the total healthcare expenditure in India is out of pocket, of which seventy percent is spent on medicines alone. This is largely because of the continuous neglect of and underinvestment in the public health facilities, as a result households end up buying highly priced medicines in the open market.

"Some states like Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan have successfully implemented a system of centralised procurement and decentralised distribution of free medicines in their public health facilities, however, a systematic scaling up of such schemes throughout the country remains a distant dream. This report discusses in great detail the current scenario in India with respect to access to medicines and highlights the various factors responsible for the dismal situation while at the same time

proposing viable policy options to deal with the problem at hand," it says.

The second report, 'drug pricing ceiling' is an independent evaluation of the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Policy (NPPP), 2012 and the Drugs Price Control Order (DPCO), 2013. This report is a comprehensive evaluation of the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Policy (NPPP), 2012 and the Drugs Price Control Order (DPCO), 2013 and examines implications of the policy for both access to medicines and industrial development.