

Experts focus on critical management of pharma supply chain

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In the emerging age of biologics, gene therapies and personalised medicine, pharmaceutical products – drugs and medicines – will have short lifespans, must be shipped in tightly managed, cryogenic conditions and in just-in-time timelines. And here is where supply chain management becomes critical.

During a day-long series of panel discussions in Mumbai on ‘The Future of Supply Chain Management’, participants and discussants underscored the importance of putting the patient at the centre of healthcare delivery and medicine. In other words, meeting global standards in supply chain management are essential for ensuring safe, efficacious and quality medicines to people who need them, when they need them.

This process begins with the sourcing of the active pharmaceutical ingredient (API) and goes through the manufacture, packaging, distribution and storage of medicines before it reaches the patient at the other end. The integrity of the supply chain is what makes the outcomes patient-centric. Yet, many of us are familiar with media reports of frequent instances wherein counterfeit and poor quality medicines have caused unnecessary loss of people’s lives.

Participants and experts on the panels shared learnings and cited lessons from other industries like fast moving consumer goods (FMCG), an industry which also deals extensively in perishables. Others talked about what it took to build a really good supply chain, the roles that logistics and warehousing played in making sure that medicines do not lose their efficacy (or curative power) during transportation and storage.

A key panel explained how artificial intelligence and blockchain technology ensures that supply chains operate with 100 per cent precision. Case studies and examples of what other countries are doing that we can learn from were also shared.

Ensuring quality of medicine is a responsibility of the pharmaceutical industry, said A Vaidheesh, President Organisation of Pharmaceutical Producers of India (OPPI). "Global best- practices ensure that the quality of medicine is not compromised for the Indian patient."

Kanchana TK, Director General, OPPI added, "Making medicines is a series of complex processes involving manufacturing, supply chain, intermediaries and markets. Ensuring the integrity of the supply chain till it reaches the patient is critical. The future of the pharma supply chain will only get more advanced with the advent of technology and its interface."

"The future of pharma supply chain will need to ensure that medicines delivered to patient retain effectiveness. Tech-enabled supply chain will not only increase efficiency and quality of medicines dispensed but will also encourage patient-centred care." said Sudarshan Jain, Director General, Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance (IPA).

Daara Patel, Secretary General, Indian Drug Manufacturers Association (IDMA) was just as emphatic on the importance of supply chain integrity. "We have several thousand manufacturers involved in making medicines," he said. "Making sure that they all adhere to the global manufacturing practices is important to patient safety."