

Four Pharma companies get licenses for anti-HIV drugs

18 July 2014 | News | By BioSpectrum Bureau

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Medicines Patent Pool(MPP), a United Nations-backed organization that facilitates cheaper HIV treatment in developing countries, has announced a fresh agreement to manufacture two anti-Aids medicines with seven generic drug makers, four of which are Indian firms, which are Aurobindo, Cipla, Emcure and Micro Labs.

MPP does sign agreements with innovator companies to share new drug patents in a pool that can be accessed by generic companies to manufacture and sell cheaper versions of those anti-HIV drugs. And generic companies seek sub-licenses for these drug patents.

In the latest agreement, four Indian companies were given manufacturing licenses for next generation or second line anti-HIV treatments - Bristol Myers Squibbs' atazanavir and ViiV Healthcare's dolutegravir.

The WHO estimates that there will be more than one million people on second-line treatment by 2016 and many more will need access to the same. MPP currently has nine anti-HIV drug patents in its pool and ten generic manufacturing sub-licenses.

Indian firms Aurobindo and Emcure have been associated with MPP and have 5-6 anti-HIV drug licenses. The new agreement to manufacture atazanavir adds to their existing portfolio.

Cipla has also made an entry to MPP with a license for dolutegravir. This adds to their anti-HIV portfolio and exports.

The agreement will help generic companies expand market size for these advanced AIDS therapies in developing countries of Africa and South Asia. These are markets where the drugs will be priced quite low, but with a large AIDS burden, these low income countries offer huge volumes.

It also helps them avoid the hassle of seeking voluntary licenses from innovator firms or applying for compulsory licenses in those markets.

Till then generic companies will benefit from increased exports to and penetrations in other big anti-HIV markets.