

Indian e-pharma obstructed with muddled Regulatory norms

22 June 2016 | News | By BioSpectrum Bureau

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Online pharmacies emerging in India have met with major concerns regarding the misuse of technology, safety concerns on electronic prescriptions and opposition from offline chemists faced by the industry.

The Indian Internet Pharmacy Association (IIPA), is leading the Indian e-pharma players to bring to notice and resolve the roadblocks raised by the regulatory bodies. While the IIPA members strive hard to follow regulations and operate legally, it has taken up as its mission to clarify that it is not the non-adherence of regulations, but the lack of a proper regulatory framework that has become a stumbling block e-pharma startups.

The pharmaceutical business falls under the Drug and Cosmetics Act, 1940. The IPA members have requested the sub-committee created by the 48th Drug Consultative Committee formed in July last year, by Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI), to formulate guidelines on the use of technology in pharma. The committee was expected to submit the report within three months (by October last year), but has not come up with even the draft report yet.

The Maharashtra Food and Drug Administration (FDA) filed an FIR against Mchemist Global Pvt Ltd and has also asked to maintain a strict vigil on all activities conducted by the epharma companies. There are regular probes and raids at office spaces, where employees are frisked and threatened. Mumbai-based Pharmeasy, Delhi-based M-chemist and Mera Medicare in Gujarat had recently faced police investigations and FIRs.

The industry has been losing about 50-60 percent business because of being stringent with prescriptions and renewing requests. India's pharmaceuticals industry is expected to account for about 3.1-3.6 percent of the global pharma industry by value, and currently accounts for 10 percent by volume. (Source: Make in India Statistics) The \$18-billion pharma retail market is set to grow to \$55 billion by 2020 and is fast coming under the spotlight due to its growth potential in the coming years. Online e-pharma startups in India have already raised \$92.6 million in funding so far.

Currently, India has about 45-50 e-pharma startups, major players being 1mg.com, Bookmeds, mChemist, Medidart, Medlife,

Medstar, Netmeds, Pharomeasy, Zigy.com (PM Health & Life Care), SaveOnMedicals and Savemymeds.