

NEWS



Discount pharmacies in India will reduce financial burden on patients

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Two pharmacy units that will dispense drugs for heart diseases and cancer at highly discounted rates have been inaugurated at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS).¹

At these Affordable Medicines and Reliable Implants for Treatment (AMRIT) pharmacies, patients will soon be able to purchase about 186 cardiovascular drugs, 148 types of cardiac implants, and 202 cancer drugs that will be 50-60% cheaper than on the open market. Cancer drugs will initially be available from the two pharmacy units with valid prescriptions, and cardiac drugs will be available by the end of November.

The project is run by HLL Lifecare, a government enterprise. Plans are under way to introduce the AMRIT units in central government hospitals across the country.

In 2013 about 86% of private expenditure on health in India was paid for out of pocket,² and in 2014-15 about 76% of India's residents were not covered by any health insurance policy.³

Speaking at the launch of the pharmacies Shri J P Nadda, union minister for health and family welfare, said that the pharmacies "will go a long way in reducing [the] financial burden on

patients," calling the project "an innovative initiative." He said that the government was looking to scale up the programme and considering ways to make this facility accessible to more people across the country.

India is home to more than 30 million people with heart disease⁴ and 2.8 million with a cancer diagnosis. Over half of those with cancer drop out of treatment after a few cycles of chemotherapy because they cannot afford the medicine.

- 1 Press Information Bureau, Government of India. Health minister opens AMRIT outlet at AIIMS for selling affordable drugs for cancer and heart diseases. 15 Nov 2015. <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=130495>.
- 2 World Bank. Out-of-pocket health expenditure (% of private expenditure on health). <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.XPD.OOPC.ZS>.
- 3 Press Information Bureau, Government of India. Medical insurance portability. 7 Aug 2015. <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=124606>.
- 4 Press Information Bureau, Government of India. India needs a comprehensive approach to combating heart disease—vice president. 27 Sep 2015. <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=128227>.

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