

DROP IN SUPPLIES

Price of key drug for kids with heart ailment hiked

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THE APEX drug regulator has decided to increase the per unit price of Furoped, a life saving drug for paediatric heart patients, by almost eight times following reports of the drug going off the shelves after its price was reduced by over 90 per cent last year. The ceiling price will be raised to Rs 2.60 per ml against the current 29 p per ml — the price of a 30 ml bottle will go up from Rs 10 to Rs 78.

Furoped or Furosemide, commonly known as lasix, is a diuretic prescribed for babies with heart ailments. It drains the body of fluids to reduce the load on the heart. There is little else that works in case of such babies when respiratory distress starts as a result of fluid accumulation.

The submission by Samarth Pharmaceuticals, the firm supplying the drug, was taken up at a full meeting of the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority on Thursday. The firm sought a revision of prices with an account of costs and margins to argue that the Rs 10 per unit ceiling price made the product unviable to be marketed by a commercial venture. While the minutes of the meeting are yet to be finalised, sources told *The Indian Express* that the new ceiling price will be set at Rs 2.60 per ml.

The drug price was reduced by 92 per cent in November last year after which the company reduced supplies by almost 40 per cent, according to official data. The maximum retail price was Rs 106 before the NPPA capped the price. Interestingly, the decision to fix the ceiling price at 29 p per ml was taken without access to market data.

NPPA chairman R K Vats said, "In a full meeting of the authority, the submission of the company for the refixing was... considered today. They had been asked to submit the relevant documents showing costs etc. Those were considered and a decision has been taken to refix the price at the level that the company has asked for. We do not want patients to be inconvenienced."

Samarth officials said that the company had merely submitted the relevant cost and margin calculations to the authority but refrained from suggesting any suitable price cap.

Thursday's decision to up the ceiling price has exposed the loopholes in the process of price fixation in the NPPA. The order issued on November 23, 2017 had read, "Whereas NPPA also sought information from the various government procurement agencies under Central government and States and State Medical Services Corporation, as it is necessary to fix ceiling prices of scheduled formulations. Accordingly, in the absence of the relevant market based data in the Pharmatrac report of AIOCD-AWACS, it has been decided in the authority meeting held in the NPPA on 19/9/2017 to fix the ceiling prices of remaining scheduled formulations on the basis of procurement prices."