

Vaccine Production in Private Sector

A Comment

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THE new drug policy was announced on December 18, 1986. The total thrust of the drug policy is antipeople—the prices of various drugs will increase substantially (50 per cent to 300 per cent). Also, the new drug policy has given undue concessions to foreign multinational drug companies and monopoly houses of India. The small and medium manufacturers along with public sector will get a set back with this new drug policy. Its above impact can be understood with one example.

Earlier all the vaccines were being manufactured by the public sector in India. There may be multi-factorial reasons for these vaccines being in short supply, but in whatever limited quantity, these were being provided to the general public free of cost in government hospitals.

One example can be taken that of antirabic vaccine. There have been many reports in newspapers about the short supply of these vaccines in governmental hospitals. The reasons of less production and lacunae in regular supply have not been thoroughly evaluated. The new drug policy has given the option to private companies to manufacture these vaccines.

One of the companies Behring Biologicals, a division of Hoechst India Limited has come out with an antirabic vaccine with a brand name of 'Rabipur'.

The various advantage of this vaccine over the already produced vaccine by public sector are documented as follow:

- New generation tissue culture vaccine.
 - Potent.
 - Safe.
 - Economical.
 - It is to be given intramuscular instead of intraperitoneal.
- The dosage is one injection on each of days 0, 3, 7, 14, 30 and 90 (hence less drop out).
- Rabipur should be stored protected from light at +2 to 8°C.
 - Cost of 1 ml. is Rs. 100 whereas total dose is 6 ml. Thereby cost is Rs. 600 for one patient.

New certain questions can be raised.

How is it economical?

a) Its cost is Rs. 600 for one course whereas the cost of vaccines manufactured by public sector is Rs. 40 per vial,

whereas this was given free of cost in the government hospitals.

b) Moreover immunoglobulins are also recommended along with Rabipur injections which entail further cost of Rs. 300-400.

c) Even a lay person can understand how far economical it is. Of course it can be said to be economical when the cost is, compared with other brand names where cost is Rs. 2100 for one course.

Is it potent and safe?

The advertisement pamphlet reads as under:

1. Slight reactions at the site of injection such as pain, erythema and swelling may occur in less than 5 per cent patients.

2. Isolated instances of lymphadenopathy, headache, lethargy, slight elevations of temperature and allergic reactions of skin have be reported.

3. No experiences are yet available with regard to administration during pregnancy.

4. This should not be used where there is a known allergy to neomycin, chlortetracycline, amphotericin B, or chicken protein. Prophylactic vaccination should not be undertaken.

The above statements made by the company themselves raise many suspicions.

1. Is the vaccine really as safe as claimed?

2. Will this be experimented on pregnant woman in India as many other drugs are being experimented. Does the company consider that Indian pregnant women are guinea pigs?

3. The only thing which is an improvement is that the route of administration is intramuscular rather than intraperitoneal but as the number of abscess formation in S/C or I/M immunisation is increasing who knows what will be the percentage of abscesses with this I/M injections.

The new drug policy by opening vaccine manufacture to private firms will only cater to the needs of those who can pay Rs. 600 to Rs. 2000 for simple antirabic vaccination.

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Myth of Alternative Medicine

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THE so-called 'radical perspective' of medicine has many degrees, but all of them agree that modern medicine is more or less bad, ineffective and expensive while traditional medical systems are projected as a sort of magical remedy to all health problems. This view has gone into the folklore of self-proclaimed 'radical' writers and has been repeated ad nauseam, without

discrimination of scientific examination. A close look at this concept reveals several fundamental flaws; to the extent of making it a reactionary rather than a radical view point.

In the first place, the glorification of traditional systems is utopian and unrealistic. To keep recalling bygone 'golden ages' is fruitless. The fact is that at the present time, all traditional