

Government of Pakistan

Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations & Coordination

Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan

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Press Note

“Drugs unavailable in the market due to unrealistic prices, currently being sold through unregulated channels at exponentially high prices to be made available locally”

In response to long-term shortages of some key or lifesaving medicines, the Federal Cabinet on Tuesday allowed rationalizing prices of drugs that had been reported to be in short supply due to unrealistically low prices. This change was approved for drugs in the “hardship category” on the recommendation of the Drug Pricing Committee (DPC) under the Drugs Pricing Policy of 2018.

Over the years, the allowed price increase of these drugs were insufficient to prevent non-availability (and consequent selling of such drugs on the black-market), as well as to a lack of control of the quality of drugs obtained in this way, outside official channels. Taking these factors into consideration, the DPC in its 37th, 38th and 39th meetings recommended increases in the prices of these non-available / scarce drugs to the Federal Government.

The list of drugs whose prices have been allowed to increase includes medicines such as furosemide injections (for emergency use in high blood pressure), acetazolamide tablets (for glaucoma), hydralazine tablets (for lowering blood pressure), carbamazepine tablets and suspension (for epilepsy), atropine sulphate injection (used in emergencies), magnesium sulphate (used to treat seizures due to pre-eclampsia during pregnancy), hydroxyurea, daunorubicin, bleomycin (all used in the treatment of cancer), nitroglycerin and glyceryl trinitrate (emergency heart medicines) and anti-rabies vaccine, amongst others.

As an example, the price of acetazolamide tablets has been fixed at Rs. 60.45 for a pack of 30 tablets for over a decade, despite increases in the cost of the raw material needed to produce this drug in the international market, the devaluation of the rupee and other factors such as increase in the price of packaging material and reduced volume of usage compared to the past. What this has meant is that this drug, which is not commonly used, but is nevertheless essential in some clinical situations, has been available only on the black-market, at greatly inflated prices.

The decision to allow necessary increases in the prices of such drugs will enable viable manufacture and ready availability of these essential medications to the public, instead of forcing people to purchase medicines of dubious quality at exorbitant black-market prices.