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July 27, 2006 18:30 PM

Medicines In M'sia Dearer Than Even In Developed Countries: Survey

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The price of medicines in Malaysia is much higher than even in developed countries, according to a survey by two local universities.

The survey covering branded drugs and generic medicines at 20 public hospitals, 32 private retail pharmacies and 20 dispensing doctors found the price of these medicines to be higher by between 10 and 16 times than the International Reference Price (IRP) under the World Health Organisation methodology.

"In the private retail pharmacies, we found that the prices of branded medicines could be as high as 16 times the IRP and 10 times for generic drugs," said Zaheer Ud-

Din Babar of the University College Sedaya International's School of Pharmacy who headed the survey team.

The survey covered Penang, Johor Baharu, Kota Baharu and Kuala Lumpur.

Government hospitals are also not spared of high medicine prices.

"Although medicines are free to patients in the public sector, the procurement prices were collected and analysed, and our conclusion is that the prices of some of the medicines are still much higher than the IRP," he told Bernama.

"We are concerned that medicines such as for hypertension and depression which are patented are highly priced when there are no generic alternatives available. For generic drugs, the Median Price Ratio is still about six times that of the IRP. There is no obvious reason why the Median Price Ratio should exceed two times that of IRP, as it has proven that generic drugs can be lower than two times in Sri Lanka and India."

Zaheer said the team was also surprised with its finding that for Innovator Brand fluoxetine (used for curing depression), the highest Median Price Ratio is 31.06 that of the IRP while the antibiotic ciprofloxacin, in the retail pharmacy has a Median Price Ratio of 111.63 times of the IRP.

"This is beyond our imagination," he said.

The survey was approved by the Health Ministry in an effort to control the pricing, quality and effectiveness of medicines in the market.

Health Minister Datuk Dr Chua Soi Lek said recently that his ministry would regulate and monitor the prices of medicines used for the treatment of hypertension, diabetes and flu.

"There have been many complaints that medicines are getting more expensive, and prices differ from state to state. Thus, it is time we have a policy to safeguard the public's interests," Chua had said, adding that pharmaceutical companies would have to submit international market pricing when they register new drugs.

Dean of UCSI's Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Pharmacy, Prof Datuk Dr Roslani Abdul Majid, suggested that a more comprehensive regulation was necessary to control the price of medicines in the interests of the general public who had to pay more for doctors' prescriptions.

"In countries like India, the generic drugs are manufactured locally and the prices are controlled. With proper quality control, generic drugs are equally as effective as branded ones," he added.

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