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Health ministry to conduct training on GS1 barcode prior to implementation

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Gireesh Babu, Mumbai

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<http://www.pharmabiz.com/article/detnews.asp?articleid=57197§ionid=>

The Union health ministry in collaboration with GS1 India and pharmaceutical industry, is planning to conduct a series of technical training sessions in various parts of the country on barcoding prior to its implementation as compulsory for all drugs, medical devices and other medical supplies for the government, it is learnt.

The ministry has formed two working groups, one for pharmaceutical formulations and another for medical devices, to finalise a roadmap for the process and will conduct training sessions at least in the major hubs of these industries to provide adequate information on barcoding.

The working group consists of members from the industry organisations, officials from the ministry and GS1 India, a leading global organisation which offers the GS1 system of standards, claimed as the most widely used supply chain standards system in the world.

The move comes in the backdrop of complaints from the pharma and medical devices industry, especially from the small and medium entrepreneurs, on mandating a comparatively new technology which demands more training among the manufacturers and suppliers. Earlier, the government has announced that the new system would be mandated from April 1, 2010.

The working group, which met for the first time in the end of July, is expected to meet again sometime this month to discuss about the options of implementation and training.

The meetings would also delve into issues like whether the barcodes should be printed on the outer package of the product only or on every strip, in the case of medicines, and the number of training sessions to be conducted in various parts of the country, said sources.

Since most of the government procurement demands are met by the small and medium scale pharma companies, the manufacturers should be provided thorough training on the technology before implementation of the new system, said S V Veeramani, chairman-SME Committee, Indian Drug Manufacturers Association (IDMA).

He added that the association will ask the government to conduct workshops on barcoding in maximum number of centers in the country, at least in all the major pharma hubs, prior to implementation of barcoding. However, finding the simplicity and the affordability of barcoding as industry friendly, the association has suggested the same solution to ensure authenticity of pharma exports too. This is important

especially when the Director General of Foreign Trade is searching for anti counterfeiting solutions in collaboration with the Pharmexcil to curb activities maligning the reputation of India as supplier of quality drugs.

The ministry, in the beginning of 2010, has mandated that the GS1 barcodes should be incorporated as part of commodity labeling and packaging specifications by all its suppliers, which will help the government to identify all medical supplies in a unique, unambiguous and universal manner, besides facilitating efficient management of stocks through the supply chain, by tracking and ensuring timely and accurate recalls and withdrawals when required, management of drugs according to their expiry dates, e-procurement etc.

The Association of Indian Medical Device Industry (AIMED) has earlier urged the ministry to implement the system in a phased manner for the period 2010-11 wherein initially only shelf boxes and shipping cartons may be considered.

As reported earlier, the small and medium scale pharma manufacturers and suppliers raised concerns on the implementation of GS1 barcode to apply for government bids, since majority of them found that the system is new to them and needs training prior to making it mandatory.