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NEWS LETTER
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Heart-burn for Pharma Firms: After Valsartan, FDA Red-flags Ranitidine for Cancer-causing Impurity

First, the alarm was sounded for the presence of a "probable" cancer-causing substance in Valsartan, used to treat blood pressure and heart failure. And now, a similar concern has been expressed by the United States Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) on heart-burn drug Ranitidine.

Over the weekend, the USFDA said that "some Ranitidine medicines, including some products commonly known as the brand-name drug Zantac, contain a nitrosamine impurity called N-nitrosodimethylamine (NDMA) at low levels." NDMA is classified as a probable human carcinogen (a substance that could cause cancer) based on results from laboratory tests, the regulatory authority said. And while the agency was working with international regulators and industry to determine the source of this impurity in Ranitidine, it did not stop people from taking the medicine and advised them to talk to their doctors if they wished to discontinue it.

In India, Ranitidine has multiple producers, as did Valsartan. And the spotlight is on the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) to see how it advises doctors prescribing these medicines.

"The impurity is minimal, but the DCGI needs to get it checked and get pharmaceutical companies to submit data on these drugs," said Ravi Wankhedkar, former President of the Indian Medical Association. There has been no advisory to doctors yet from the drug regulator's office, he told Business Line, adding that the situation was similar with Valsartan. Doctors continue to to prescribe both drugs, he added.

The size of the Ranatidine market is pegged at ₹730 crore a year (including combinations of the drug), with over 180 generic versions in the market, according to data from AIOCD-AWACS. A host of companies including Cadila Pharma, GlaxoSmithKline, JB Chemicals and Zydus Cadila sell versions of the drug. Interestingly, Sanofi, which sells Zantac globally, does not sell it in India.

The USFDA's red-flag on Valsartan, too, saw several drug regulators issue cautionary directives.
In India, the Valsartan market was pegged at ₹263 crore a year, with over 50 manufacturers, including Novartis, Cipla, Lupin and Torrent, making generic versions and combinations.

Carcinogen alert

NDMA is an environmental contaminant found in water and foods. In the case of Valsartan, the impurity trail seemed to trace back to the active pharmaceutical ingredient sourced largely from China and India. Companies including Hetero and Aurobindo recalled their products.

The FDA action on Ranitidine came about following an investigation of NDMA and other nitrosamine impurities in blood pressure and heart failure medicines called Angiotensin II Receptor Blockers (ARBs) since last year. In the case of ARBs, the FDA has recommended recalls as it discovered unacceptable levels of nitrosamines.

The FDA is evaluating whether the low levels of NDMA in Ranitidine pose a risk to patients. "Patients should be able to trust that their medicines are as safe as they can be and that the benefits of taking them outweigh any risk to their health. Although NDMA may cause harm in large amounts, the levels the FDA is finding in Ranitidine from preliminary tests barely exceed amounts you might expect to find in common foods," it said. (Source: Business Line)

Council for Healthcare and Pharma (CHP) at the New Jersey India Roundtable Organised by USIBC & FICCI

Honorable Philip D. Murphy, Governor – State of New Jersey & Dr Gurpreet Sandhu, President – Council for Healthcare and Pharma (CHP) & Founder - Reva Pharma at the New Jersey – India Inaugural Business Roundtable,

High powered commercial delegation from New Jersey, USA led by Governor Philip D. Murphy, former US Ambassador to Germany and along-standing senior with global investment bank Goldman Sachs, is presently on a week-long visit to India, making a strong push for investments to their home State.

At the kick-off 'New Jersey- India roundtable' organised by the US India Business Council and FICCI, in New Delhi, on Monday 16th Sept 2019, the Governor made a strong pitch to Indian investors and companies particularly in IT, Pharmaceuticals and biotechnical industries, inviting them to invest in the State. The Council for Healthcare and Pharma (CHP) was a participant, this being a priority sector.

New Jersey with a population of over 420,000 Indians is familiar ground to Indian pharmaceutical majors like Aurobindo Pharma, CIPLA, Lupin & Sun Pharma, all of whom have sizable long-standing investments in the State. Twelve of the top twenty pharma companies and eleven of the top twenty medical device manufacturers also have operations in New Jersey. Besides, New Jersey has a vast pool of Indians having a strong educational background with innovation deeply embedded in their DNA and access to top quality universities and five medical schools. The State ranks second in Biosciences. Fifty percent of all FDA approvals come from Companies with a New Jersey footprint. Thus, the focus on creating a strong health ecosystem with preference to Technology, Pharmaceuticals and Start-ups remains a priority.

Among the key speakers and important dignitaries present were Ms. KiranMazumdar Shaw, Chairperson & MD, Biocon Ltd; Senators Vin Gopal and Sam Thompson both, strong advocates for health; Tim Sullivan, President & CEO, New Jersey Economic Development Authority; Robert Garverick, Minister Counsellor for Economic Affairs, Environment, Science & Technology, US Embassy; Ms Ambika Sharma, MD, USIBC India, Vishnu Dusad, Senior Committee Member, FICCI; Dr Gurpreet Sandhu, President, Council For Healthcare and Pharma (CHP) & Founder of Reva Pharma.

Cigna Rolls Out New Plan to Fully Cover Multi-Million Dollar Gene Therapies

Health insurer Cigna Corp said, it had introduced a plan to fully cover costs for expensive gene therapies, eliminating any out-of-pocket payments for customers.

Gene therapies, which in general aim to treat diseases by manipulating genes at a cellular level, are among the most expensive treatments in the world.

While there are only two approved gene therapies in the United States, drug makers have been pouring in millions of dollars into the development of these treatments that could offer a potential one-time cure to rare and life-threatening disorders.

The first two gene therapies to be included in Cigna's program are blindness therapy, Luxturna, and the most expensive drug in the world Novartis' $2.1 million spinal muscular atrophy treatment, Zolgensma, the insurer said.

Spark Therapeutics Inc and Novartis AG's Luxturna, the first-approved gene therapy in the United States, has been criticized for its price tag of $850,000, or $425,000 per eye.

Additional therapies may be added to the program, and it will be able to leverage the expertise of its pharmacy benefits manager Express Scripts, which it bought for $54 billion last year, Cigna said.

The initiative comes about a year after Reuters reported Express Scripts was in talks with biotechnology companies to have its specialty pharmaceutical business exclusively distribute their new gene therapies when they become available.

Cigna's new program protects employers and unions against the high price shocks associated with new breakthrough therapies, the company said.

The addressable market for ongoing gene therapy development programs could be as big as 2.4 billion patients worldwide, and is only expected to grow in size, Guggenheim analyst Whitney Ijem said in a note on Wednesday. (Source: Economic Times)

Pharmaceutical Industry Most Poorly Regarded by Americans, says Gallup

The drug industry in the US has been touching new lows. According to Gallup's annual work and education survey, conducted from August 1 to 14, the pharmaceutical industry is now the most poorly regarded industry in Americans' eyes, ranking last on a list of 25 industries.

"The new low in the pharmaceutical industry's US image comes amid a range of criticisms of industry norms, from generating the highest drug costs in the world to spending massive amounts in lobbying politicians to the industry's role in the US opioid crisis," Gallup said.

The pharmaceutical industry has unseated the federal government as the lowest-rated industry this year, in terms of its net-positive score. From 2011 to 2018, the government had been last or tied for last. Americans' net ratings for the pharmaceutical industry have never been lower since Gallup first polled on industries in 2001.

Americans continue to give their highest ratings to the restaurant and computer industries, while the grocery industry and agriculture and farming also rank near the top of the list. Other industries that rank among the top half of the list include travel, accounting, automobile, retail, real estate, banking, electric and gas utilities, and sports. (Source: PharmaCompass)

Drug Mixup in Spain Causes Werewolf Syndrome in Children

In Spain, at least 17 children developed a form of werewolf syndrome (a rare and curious condition that causes excessive hair growth) after they were given a wrong medication to treat heartburn. The drug the children were wrongly given was meant to stop hair loss.

Spanish health authorities have blamed the packaging mix-up on Farma-Química Sur, a pharmaceutical company in the Malaga region of Spain

Spain's health minister, Maria Luisa Carcedo, said Farma-Quimica Surhad erroneously distributed to pharmacists minoxidil, a drug that helps fight baldness, that was labeled omeprazole, a drug that treats acid reflux.

The mislabeled medicine was recalled in July and the company was closed down until an investigation into the error is completed. "We have immobilized all the batches," Carcedo said.

The children who took the mislabeled medicine, some of them babies, began growing hair all over their bodies. The parents of these children plan to sue Farma-Química Sur. Some families have filed criminal lawsuits against the company.

Farma-Química Sur's inspection by the Spanish health authorities in June 2019 uncovered that the firm was importing active ingredients, without following proper procedures, from a Chinese supplier which had failed an EU GMP inspection in 2016. The firm's cleaning procedures were also found to be inadequate and there "was no active participation of management in the quality system".

Meanwhile, the Spanish dermatology association said the unwanted hair should start to fall out about three months after the children stop taking the drug. (Source: PharmaCompass)

Drug Makers File Second Court Challenge to Canada's New Drug Price

Canada's main pharmaceutical industry lobby group, along with 16 of its member companies, filed a lawsuit recently to block new regulations meant to lower patented drug prices, the second legal challenge to a new regime that could eventually reduce prices in the United States as well.

Canada published the final regulations in August, despite heavy lobbying from drug companies, which stand to lose revenue as prices drop. The federal government estimates the new rules will save Canadian patients, employers and insurers, including governments, C$13.2 billion ($10 billion) over a decade.

The lawsuit was filed in federal court and led by Innovative Medicines Canada (IMC), which represents major drugmakers in Canada. It is separate from a lawsuit filed last month and focuses on federal patent law, arguing that Canada cannot use regulations to fundamentally alter the role of its federal drug price regulator.

IMC was not a plaintiff in a Quebec Superior Court challenge filed in August, which argued that price regulation falls within provincial jurisdiction.

"We would not enter into this lightly. The industry lives and breathes saving lives, but it does require a viable business model to do so," IMC President Pamela Fralick said in an interview. "Canada is not creating a sustainable environment for innovative medicines."

Fralick said industry had been trying to work with Health Canada to find policy alternatives to the proposal for nearly two years.

IMC has argued that new drugs may launch late or not at all in Canada if prices fall, and that the policy will discourage investment in Canada. The government says other countries with lower drug prices have investment and drug access that are as good as or better than Canada's.

Lower prices in Canada could spill into the United States, since the Trump administration said in July it would allow the US states and other groups to start pilot programmes importing drugs from Canada. The administration is also considering linking what it pays for drugs under Medicare, which provides federal health insurance for Americans aged 65 or older, to prices abroad, including in Canada.

The new regulations, which go into force from July 1, 2020, change the list of countries with which Canada's federal drug price regulator, the Patented Medicine Prices Review Board, compares domestic prices, dropping the United States and Switzerland, where prices are the highest. It will also let the agency consider the cost-effectiveness of new medicines for the first time.

Plaintiffs in the new case include Canadian subsidiaries of AbbVie, Astellas Pharma, AstraZeneca, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Eli Lilly, Novartis and Pfizer.
(Source: Express Pharma)

Chinese Cheer for Indian Cancer-Drug Manufacturers

Dragon nation allows patients to import drugs that are not registered with its regulator New norms for drug imports announced by the Chinese government are expected to benefit Indian pharma companies in the oncology segment.

“From December, China will be allowing cancer patients to import drugs which are not registered with Chinese regulators,’’ R Uday Bhaskar, Director, Pharmaceutical Exports Promotion Council (Pharmaexcil), an arm of the Ministry of Commerce, told BusinessLine.

China has been witnessing a rapid increase in the incidence of cancer with an annual addition of about 10 lakh patients, the official said. According to industry estimates, the cancer drug market in China is expected to grow to $25-27 billion over the next five years.

How it helps

With patients having direct access to imports, the outcome “is going to be very good for Indian pharma, which is known for quality as well as affordability,’’ Uday Bhaskar added. Indian drug makers will also get some relief from the hassles of registration. The Chinese regulator charges a whopping $80,000 for registration of products which is ‘expensive’ by Indian standards.

In India, leading oncology generic drug makers have also been stepping up their focus on the Chinese market. For instance, Natco Pharma Ltd, according to its Vice- Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Rajiv Nannapaneni, “is working with Mylan’’ on Copaxone for the Chinese market and “will come up with a strategy very soon”.

The efforts of pharma majors like Dr Reddy’s Laboratories, which are increasingly tapping the potential for biosimilar drugs to treat cancer, could also bear fruit going forward.

About half a dozen biosimilar products of Dr. Reddy’s are being sold in India and in various emerging markets. The company also has “an active development pipeline of several biosimilar products in the oncology and immunology space,’’ it said recently.

India’s drug exports to China have been growing steadily in recent years. In 2018-19, they increased 14.3 per cent to $230 million compared with the previous financial year. In the first quarter of the current financial year, the growth surged by 37 per cent, Pharmexcil data show. “The prospects for the India pharma industry lie in China and Japan where we need step up focus significantly,’’ said Uday Bhaskar.
(Source: Business Line)

USFDA Issues Response Letter for New Drug Application for Insulin Glargine: Biocon

Biotechnology major Biocon on Saturday said the US health regulator has issued a Complete Response Letter for a new drug application for insulin glargine filed by the company's partner Mylan.

The United Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) has also issued four observations after cGMP inspection of one of Biocon's biologics drug product facilities in Bengaluru, the company said in a BSE filing.

"The USFDA has issued a Complete Response Letter (CRL) for the New Drug Application (NDA) for Insulin Glargine filed by our partner Mylan," it said. As per the USFDA, a Complete Response Letter is sent to an applicant if the agency determines that it will not approve the application or abbreviated application in its present form.

The CRL has been issued pending completion of the corrective and preventive actions (CAPAs) submitted to the USFDA in response to the observations made at the conclusion of the pre-approval inspection of our insulin manufacturing facility in Malaysia in June 2019," a Biocon spokesperson said in a statement.

The CRL did not identify any outstanding scientific issues with the application, it added.We remain confident of the quality of our application and do not anticipate any impact of this CRL on the commercial launch timing of our Insulin Glargine in the US," the statement said.

Biocon is working closely with its partner and the regulator to complete these CAPAs to the satisfaction of the USFDA, it added.

The spokesperson also said the USFDA conducted a Current Good Manufacturing Practice (cGMP) inspection at one of the company's Biologics Drug Product facilities in Bengaluru from Aug 22 to 30, 2019."The inspection concluded with four observations which we believe will not impact supplies from this facility," the statement said. Biocon is confident of addressing these observations through a corrective and preventive action plan in a timely manner, it added.
(Source: Economic Times)

Glenmark Receives ANDA Approval for Clobetasol Propionate Foam

Glenmark Pharmaceuticals, USA (Glenmark) has been granted final approval by the United States Food & Drug Administration (US FDA) for Clobetasol Propionate Foam, 0.05 per cent (Emulsion Formulation), a generic version of Olux1-E Foam, 0.05 per cent, of Mylan Pharmaceuticals. The drug is indicated for the treatment of plaque psoriasis.

According to IQVIATM sales data for the 12 month period ending July 2019, the Olux-E Foam, 0.05 per cent market achieved annual sales of approximately $11.1 million.

Glenmark’s current portfolio consists of 161 products authorised for distribution in the US marketplace and 54 ANDA’s pending approval with the US FDA. In addition to these internal filings, Glenmark continues to identify and explore external development partnerships to supplement and accelerate the growth of its existing pipeline and portfolio. (Source: Express Pharma)