

Govt repeats warning to pharma firms, says don't 'promote products in unethical ways'

In a letter to pharma organisations, govt mentioned a complaint against an event to be held by 'Indian Psychotropic Society'. Industry members say they have never heard the name.

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A pharmacy in New Delhi | Representational image | ThePrint

Text Size: **A-** **A+**

New Delhi: The Modi government last week reiterated its warning to pharma companies against offering inducements to doctors and family members.

In a letter dated 28 October to pharmaceutical associations, the Department of Pharmaceuticals (DoP), the apex body for laying down policies for drug makers, said companies should not promote their products in unethical ways, including by offering travel or accommodation to doctors attending conferences, seminars, etc.

“This department has received a complaint alleging that the Annual National Conference of Indian Psychotropic Society is going to be held in January 2021 and the pharmaceutical companies sponsor the event which goes to a few crores of amount,” states the letter, accessed by ThePrint.

It then invokes the ethics and guidelines under the Uniform Code of Pharmaceutical Marketing Practices (UCPMP), a voluntary code of conduct for ethical marketing practices.

The letter is addressed to organisations that constitute the drug maker lobby, including the Indian Drug Manufacturers Association (IDMA), the Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance (IPA), the Federation of Pharma Entrepreneurs (FOPE) and the Organisation of Pharmaceutical Producers of India (OPPI).

Speaking to ThePrint, these associations claimed they had never heard of the organisation mentioned in the letter — Indian Psychotropic Society — suggesting that it may instead be directed at the Indian Psychiatric Society (IPS), which represents psychiatrists and is



believed to be planning its annual national conference in January 2021. However, the IPS denied receiving any letter from the DoP or having any event planned for January.

When ThePrint reached Department of Pharmaceuticals secretary S. Aparna through text for a clarification, she said they are "getting it rectified". A reply is awaited on a subsequent query asking if it was indeed the IPS that they sought to refer to.

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Details of the letter

Signed by DoP deputy director Byasadev Naik, the letter invokes the UCPMP provision that states "pharmaceutical company or their associations/representatives or any person acting on their behalf shall not extend any travel facility inside the country or outside, including rail, air, ship, cruise tickets, paid vacations, etc to the healthcare professionals and their family members for vacation or for attending conference, seminar, workshops, CME program etc, as a delegate".

According to the letter, "in any seminar, conference or meeting organised by a pharmaceutical company for promoting a drug or disseminating information if a medical practitioner participates as a delegate, it will be on his or her own cost".

"In view of above, all the pharma associations are requested to make sure that the pharma companies adhere to the above provisions of UCPMP," it states.

'Unable to trace Indian Psychotropic Society'

The pharma associations said they had tried to look up the "Indian Psychotropic Society", but were unable to find it. Representatives of IDMA, IPA and FOPE, seeking anonymity, said even a Google search hadn't thrown up any results.

A veteran of the psychotropics industry, which deals in drugs devised to address mental health issues, was stumped too. "I have never heard of any such society despite being in the business of psychotropic drug manufacturing since the last 30 years," said Navdeep Chawla, managing director of pharmaceutical firm, Psychotropics India.

A senior official at DoP told ThePrint that the "name was mentioned in the complaint given to the National Human Rights Commission (on which the DoP has acted)".

The industry suggested the letter may be written for the IPS, whose annual national conference is **believed to be scheduled for** January in Visakhapatnam.

However, IPS president P.K. Dalal denied this. "We have not received any letter from the DoP and we are not Indian Psychotropic Society," he said over phone to ThePrint. When asked **about a website that claims** to be seeking registrations for the conference in the name of the IPS, Dalal didn't answer the query on call as well as via text.

The annual conference of the IPS had **evoked similar concerns** earlier this year, but the organisation had insisted on its compliance with ethical practices.

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