

NPPA calls for cap on prices of secondary cardiac devices

Even as stent prices were brought down earlier this week, exorbitant profiteering in devices like catheters, balloons and guide wires used in angioplasty procedures continue to keep the cost of cardiac procedures at a higher range.

The National Pharmaceuticals Pricing Authority (NPPA), during a series of meetings to reduce stent costs, acknowledged that the costs of these secondary devices are at times more than that of the stent. The Authority has already written to the Health Ministry to categorise these devices as essential medicines so that their prices can be capped as well.

‘Grossly exorbitant’

“The cost of cardiac catheters, balloon catheters and guide wires used in the procedure remains grossly exorbitant and leaves very high margins and scope of profiteering,” states the NPPA’s minutes of the meeting, adding that the Authority has taken note of this and decided to upload the data in the public domain.

The Authority also mentioned that it had received several complaints from health activists and cardiologists, who revealed that many hospitals were reusing catheters, balloons and guide wires after serialisation, and charging patients at the same rate as new ones or with some concession.

“The benefit of reduced stent prices will reflect in patients’ bills only when some of the corporate hospitals stop this unscrupulous extraction of money,” said a cardiologist from Mumbai.

A stenting procedure involves puncturing the artery with the help of a needle, which costs about 300. A sheath is then inserted into the artery, followed by a guiding catheter, which costs up to 6,000. A guide wire that costs about 6,000 is then placed, followed by a balloon to dilate the artery. A balloon costs anywhere up to 12,000. It is after this last step of dilation that a cardiac stent is placed. While these costs are rough estimates from a charitable trust hospital, doctors say that hospitals charge up to two to three times more for the devices. The NPPA has now made it mandatory to list the prices for these devices separately.

Expensive packages

“The overall cost of an angioplasty package, including the required two days of stay, should ideally not exceed 1.2 lakh. This is still a ballpark figure and it should vary with a lower grade of room, institute etc.,” said Mumbai-based cardiologist Dr. Dev Pehlajani. He said charitable trust hospitals have cut down costs but corporate hospitals have worked around the packages with profits in mind.

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