



Keeping dengue at bay: Industry gets shot in the arm

Pharma, insurance and consumer goods companies try to tap the business opportunity

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The rising cases of dengue across many Indian states have fast turned into new business opportunities for pharma, fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) and insurance companies.

Bengaluru-based Micro Labs, a pharmaceutical company with annual turnover of Rs 2,500 crore, recently launched a medicine to increase platelet count in patients. Priced at Rs 375 for a five-day course of 15 tablets (a unit), Caripill is primarily being marketed in the Delhi National Capital Region, Maharashtra and south Indian states, where many cases of dengue have been reported. The company has said Caripill, made from papaya leaf extracts, does not have side effects. It claimed to have sold about 200,000 units of the medicine since the launch in July, though there are critics pointing out that this is not a total cure for dengue.



Antony Jacob, the chief executive officer of Apollo Munich Health Insurance was quick to sense an opportunity in the rising double digit dengue related claims from his customers every year. But not everyone could afford to buy a health insurance or felt a need to do so. "Dengue lasts for five-seven days but results in a financial burden of Rs 35,000-50,000 if one gets hospitalised. We wanted to offer an affordable option to the public and therefore launched a dengue care plan for Rs 444 a year. I will not be surprised if by this time next year we have more players offering similar plans", he said.

In just 45 days of the launch, the firm has sold 20,000 policies, a large number of these in NCR and Maharashtra.

Jacob said that cases of dengue are not limited to particular socio-economic strata and lakhs of cases go unreported every year. In a study titled "Economic disease burden of dengue illness in India", researchers from India and the US found that the data captured only 0.35 per cent of the clinically diagnosed dengue cases in India. The study estimated that against the 20,000 cases reported annually in India, the actual number of dengue cases was nearly 6 million.

Serum Institute of India, promoted by the Poonawallas, is gearing to launch a dengue drug after it bought exclusive rights from US biotech firm Visterra recently. The vaccine is expected to be launched in three years.

"For the first time in India we will have the dengue monoclonal antibody. This antibody in animals has been found to neutralise and reduce the virus in three days. This product will do well because there is no other product. We have an exclusive tie-up with Visterra for India and some other countries", Adar Poonawalla, chief executive, told Business Standard in a recent interview.

Good Knight, the highest selling mosquito repellent brand from the Godrej stable, is promoting the use of Good Knight even at daytime when the risk of a mosquito bite leading to dengue is higher.

The Rs 1,400-crore brand has launched a new campaign- Subah Bolo Good Knight-early this month. The campaign aims to reach out to 10 million school-going kids across the country who are at a greater risk due to weaker immunity compared to adults.