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EPHARMACIES

ePharmacy

This article covers "Daily current events" and the topic is about 'ePharmacy' which is in news, it covers "Economy" In GS-3, the following content has relevance for UPSC.

For Prelims: ePharmacy

For Mains: GS-3, Economy

Why in news: The Ministry of Health issued a show-cause notice to at least twenty firms for selling medications online, including Tata-1mg, Flipkart, Apollo, PharmEasy, Amazon, and Reliance Netmeds.

ABOUT EPHARMACY

- An online pharmacy known as an "ePharmacy" ships prescription drugs to customers.
- It is a business concept unlike traditional pharmacies, which deals with the preparation and sale of prescription and non-prescription pharmaceuticals.
- There is no legal definition of "ePharmacy" in India's present legislation.
- Nevertheless, on August 28, 2018, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare released a draught to change the Medicines and Cosmetics Rules, 1945 to include e-pharmacies as well.
- "ePharmacy" is defined in Rule 67-I of the Draft Regulations as the business of distributing or selling, exhibiting for sale, or making an offer to sell pharmaceuticals via a web portal or any other electronic medium.
- These Draft Regulations outline the various business models that e-pharmacies could adopt in addition to defining the category of business that they fall under.

WORKING OF EPHARMACY

- An ePharmacy is expected to operate largely under two separate models:
 - The inventory-based model.
 - The market-place-based model.

- The inventory of drugs, medications, and service providers is controlled by the ePharmacy corporation in the inventory-based model, and the products are sold directly to the customers.
- In the market-place-based paradigm, the tech-based corporation only serves as a mediator between potential purchasers and suppliers of prescriptions and medications.
- The online pharmacy serves as a platform where approved vendors can list their goods and vendors can select.
- The ePharmacy company merely serves as an intermediary and has no inventory or products of its own.

BENEFITS

- **Easy to use:** This technique is a very simple and quick way to get medicine for those who live far from a typical pharmacy, the elderly, the disabled, and those who work very hard.
- **Time-Saving:** Customers can rapidly obtain their prescription medications online and receive them.
- **Cost-effective:** Studies show that ordering prescription medications online can result in overall financial savings of up to one-third.
- **Privacy and Confidentiality:** For those who are uncomfortable speaking to doctors and pharmacists in person, this technique is very convenient. Also, ordering drugs is possible without any restrictions on particular matters like sexuality or adolescence which can be embarrassing.
- **Compulsory drug verification:** By completing a questionnaire regarding the patient's health, these stores request a prescription from a personal doctor and then arrange drug delivery.

REGULATORY STRUCTURES & JUDICIAL ASPECTS

- The Office of Drugs Controller clarified in 2015 that the DCA and DCR do not distinguish between the traditional and online selling of medications, and as a result, ePharmacy must abide by their regulations.
- FICCI also published a Self-Regulation Code of Conduct in 2016, but this, of course, lacks legal authority.
- The High Courts voiced opposition to the Office of Drugs Controller's decision to let E-pharmacies operate under the DCA.
- The Madras High Court ruled in 2018 that the 2018 Medicines and Cosmetics (Amendment Regulations) must be promulgated before the sale of pharmaceuticals online is legal.
- The Delhi High Court then prohibited the unlicensed marketing of medications online.
- Later, a division bench of the Madras High Court stayed the judgment outlawing the selling of drugs online, stating that doing so would cause annoyance and health

problems for the people in question. As a result, the sale of pharmaceuticals online was permitted.

INDIA'S EPHARMACY GROWTH DRIVERS

- **Growing internet penetration:** Internet penetration is expanding as a result of low-cost cell phones and 4G internet access. The country is predicted to have 850 million internet users by 2025 as a result of the Digital India campaign.
- **To increase E-commerce adoption:** With evolving consumer tastes and digital channel usage, e-commerce penetration is predicted to reach 11% in 2024.
- **Push to designated channels:** People are turning to organized and digital channels that provide assurance against the possibility of counterfeit pharmaceuticals as they become more aware of the problem.
- **Evolving disease profile:** ePharmacies primarily cater to the medical requirements of chronic patients. Changing the lifestyle of the masses is leading to a rise in chronic and lifestyle diseases amongst the Indian population.

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