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## Launch of Intas cancer drug could lower prices

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Mumbai: Ahmedabad-based Intas Pharmaceuticals is launching a life-saving breast cancer drug, trastuzumab biosimilar, at Rs 19,995 (per 440 mg vial) — priced 65% lower than the existing MRP of major brands. The development, say experts, could unleash a price war of sorts in the market. With the Intas launch, the cost of treatment may reduce substantially for a breast cancer patient to Rs 4 lakh from over Rs 10 lakh.

At present, the MRP of most trastuzumab brands in India is in the Rs 58,000-Rs 63,000 range, though industry experts say the price paid by patients could be lower due to discounts offered by companies. The price cap on the drug was revised by the government in March to Rs 58,000 (per 440 mg vial). It was first put under a ceiling price of Rs 56,000 in 2016, but health activists had pointed out the ceiling price was steep, and hence unaffordable for patients.

The MRP of Intas brand, Eleftha is Rs 19,995 for 440 mg, and Rs 6,295 mg for a 150 mg injection. In patients with HER2 (human epidermal growth factor receptor 2) positive early breast cancer, almost 18 cycles of trastuzumab-based therapy are required, a company official said, adding about 60% patients cannot afford the treatment.

Breast cancer affects about two lakh women in India, of which one-fourth are HER2-positive. Trastuzumab is a targeted therapy, which has revolutionised the management of HER2-positive breast cancer, he added. Over a dozen companies in India market the drug, led by Biocon, with others including Zydus Cadila, Reliance Life Sciences, and the innovator company, Roche.

Industry experts say Intas introduces products at a lower price to grab market share, often disrupting the space. “We had used a similar strategy a few years back for cancer drug Bevacizumab, a biosimilar of Avastin,” Intas senior VP marketing (oncology) Manoj Kumar told TOI.

The move led to many companies slashing prices of their brands, which could also happen in this case. “This could lead to other players also reducing prices to sustain and grow market shares,” Reliance Life Sciences president & CEO K V Subramaniam told TOI. Others may introduce schemes where patients get two doses free with one vial.

However, Biocon chairperson & MD Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw says the company “has global impact, and will not be impacted by Intas pricing in India”. “Moreover, if biosimilars are developed just for Indian market, the cost of development is much lower than if it is for the US and Europe.”

Biocon and Mylan’s co-developed biosimilar of Roche’s blockbuster cancer drug Herceptin, trastuzumab, was approved in the US in 2017.

Though trastuzumab, the innovator drug, has been available in India since 2000, but before the entry of trastuzumab biosimilars, almost 80% of patients could not afford it.

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