

Some hospitals slash stent price, others face patient ire on bills

TNN | Feb 15, 2017, 08.50 AM IST



MUMBAI: Within hours of the Centre capping prices of coronary stents, a few private hospitals slashed the cost of their packages by 12-15%. Most hospitals assured benefits of the price regulation will be passed on to consumers, but activists fear rates of components other than implants may see a spurt to make up for the lost profits.

The Kokilaben Ambani Hospital in Andheri and **Lilavati** in Bandra said the price change would reflect immediately. "The cost of our single stent angioplasty has dropped by Rs 30,000-35,000 effective immediately. The cost of multiple stents too will be reworked accordingly," said the Andheri hospital's executive director Dr Ram Narain. Corporate hospitals such as Fortis chose not to comment.

The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) on Monday fixed the ceiling price of stents. The billing departments of hospitals went into a tizzy on Tuesday as patients wanted to be charged accordingly. A Vile Parle hospital said it had to put a case on hold as the patient refused to pay more than Rs 30,000 even though he was explained about the additional taxes.

Industry sources said stents will be temporarily withdrawn from catheterization labs for re-labelling.

The battle lines seemed to be drawn between local and international companies. "As both the Indian and international stents are available at the same price, doctors will be ethically bound to offer the latter which have proved their efficacy to the

stringent US FDA," said a doctor. But Indian companies had started offering Rs 3,000 per stent used as incentive to hospitals. "Hospitals are profit-oriented and will use the stent that benefits them," said another doctor.

The government notification has a lacuna, said an industry analyst. "Most foreign-made stents have an MRP of less than Rs 30,000. So, hospitals will still make a margin by selling them at Rs 29,600 plus local taxes. India-made stents, too, will offer the same advantage. But hospitals will not want to stock high-end stents that cost over Rs 30,000 and will offer no margin whatsoever," he added.

Mincing no words, Dr Matthew Samuel Kalarickel, who pioneered angioplasty in India, called the capping exercise "absolute nonsense". "We will see Indian patients going abroad for angioplasties as the latest technology will not be brought to India," said Kalarickel, adding that the exercise is akin to the demonetisation drive that was announced suddenly with not much guidelines. He added, "The medical fraternity wasn't given a chance to speak about stents. We were called for a meeting that began with the IAS officer insultingly asking, 'How many of you here wear two hats?' Our opinions were not noted down either." While terming it a great decision, head of cardiology at KEM Hospital Dr Prafulla Kerkar said multi-vessel angioplasties will see an increase as people can afford more stents. "However, surgeon-driven hospitals may see a rise in bypass surgeries as they could make more money. Also, it must be considered that other instruments and consumables continue to be sold at a higher price. So we have to wait and see whether it actually makes cardiac packages cheaper," he said.

Dr Tejas Patel, a cardiologist from Ahmedabad who was previously PM Narendra Modi's physician in his chief minister days, said, "Companies have withdrawn their stents from our labs. Some have instructed us to not use certain brands as they are not viable at the new prices."