The Unethical Practices of the Pharmaceutical Industries in Bangladesh in their Drug Promotion and its Impacts

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ABSTRACT

This article highlights the unethical practices of pharmaceutical industries in Bangladesh in their drug promotion and its impacts. It is evident that pharmaceutical industry is one of the promising sectors in the industrial field of Bangladesh. Now, the pharmaceutical industries of Bangladesh are exporting their products to more than 100 countries in the world after meeting the local demand. This study also represents the growth and market share of pharmaceutical industries, total exports of last five years, unethical practices in promotion of pharmaceutical industries and impacts of unethical practices. To conduct the study both secondary and primary data have been used. The target population of this study was medical professional men including physicians of Phultala Thana in Khulna District. Finally the study provides some recommendations to overcome the situation. There are a lot of rooms for Bangladesh to develop in this sector. In this study, the unethical practices in promotion of pharmaceutical industries that can make obstacle in the sustainable growth of pharmaceutical business in Bangladesh are discussed meticulously.

Keywords-- Pharmaceutical Industry, Drug Promotion, Unethical Practice and Impact

The journey of this technology and knowledge based sector was not an easy one in a country with enormous economic challenges like Bangladesh. Now, Bangladesh proved herself as a well-developed pharmaceutical sector, emerging generic drug hub in the region. But to promote their products, many of these pharmaceutical industries have adopted unethical practices in Bangladesh and their actions have brought the fame of this industry developed over the decades under questions.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This paper will focus on the unethical practices in drug promotion in Bangladesh. The particular objects of this paper are as follows:

- To identify the unethical practices in promotion done by the pharmaceutical industries in Bangladesh.
- To highlight the impact of unethical practices on general people and the sustainable growth of pharmaceutical industries in Bangladesh.
- To recommend some suggestions to overcome the present condition of pharmaceutical industries in Bangladesh and to promote a healthy industrial environment in Bangladesh.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study on the unethical practices in the promotion of the pharmaceutical industries in Bangladesh has been done with the both primary and secondary information collected from several recognized journals, magazines, newspapers and websites. After discussion with concerned professional persons of both different pharmaceutical companies and physicians primary information was collected. For gathering primary data, we have selected the area Phultala Thana in Khulna District and there we had discussion with concerned professional persons. So, the target population of this study was medical professional men including physicians of Phultala Thana in Khulna District. The survey was conducted on 20 medical professionals including physicians as sample items.

Keywords-- Pharmaceutical Industry, Drug Promotion, Unethical Practice and Impact
IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

a. Growth of Pharmaceutical Industries in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh the pharmaceutical industries have noteworthy growth and in this field a lot of potentials are there in fact. Nowadays people are getting more concerned regarding healthcare. As a result we see the demand of different medical products; drugs, vaccines against different new diseases etc. are always on the raise. So it is obvious that the demand of medical products is increasing very rapidly. Side by side the exporting rate of their products of the pharmaceutical companies of Bangladesh around the world is also increasing simultaneously. By this time different medicine companies of Bangladesh have already achieved the approval of different drug administrations (Sultana, 2016).

- Almost self-dependent; 97% requirements met by local production
- Approximate market size US$ 2 billion (2015)
- Maintained mentionable growth (c.>10-15% last few years)
- Skilled and available manpower with strong manufacturing base

- Largest white color labor intensive employment sector
- Second highest sponsor to the national treasury
- Around 150 functional among the 257 registered pharmaceutical companies
- The top ten companies are local and they have approximate 70% market share
- In the top 20 there are 4 Multi-National Companies (Novo Nordisk, Novartis, Sanofi and GSK)
- Potential companies have major approvals (US FDA, EU, GMP, UK MHRA, TGA Australia, ANVISA Brazil etc.) (Source: BAPI)

b. Potential Pharmaceutical Companies in Bangladesh

- Square Pharmaceuticals Ltd.
- Opsonin Pharmaceuticals Ltd.
- Incepta Pharmaceuticals Ltd.
- Aristopharma Ltd.
- Beximco Pharmaceuticals Ltd.
- Healthcare Pharmaceuticals Ltd.
- ACME Laboratories Ltd.
- Renata Limited
- Eskayef Bangladesh Ltd
- ACI Ltd.

Table 1: Market Share and Growth of Ten Potential Bangladeshi Pharmaceutical Companies in The year - 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr No</th>
<th>Name of the Company</th>
<th>Market Share (%)</th>
<th>Growth Rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Square Pharmaceuticals Ltd.</td>
<td>18.78</td>
<td>22.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Opsonin Pharmaceuticals Ltd.</td>
<td>5.07</td>
<td>28.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Incepta Pharmaceuticals Ltd.</td>
<td>9.21</td>
<td>29.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Aristopharma Ltd.</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>24.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Beximco Pharmaceuticals Ltd.</td>
<td>8.75</td>
<td>33.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Healthcare Pharmaceuticals Ltd.</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>16.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>ACME Laboratories Ltd.</td>
<td>4.87</td>
<td>27.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Renata Limited</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>21.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Eskayef Bangladesh Ltd.</td>
<td>4.80</td>
<td>22.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>ACI Ltd.</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>21.91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Market Share of potential Pharmaceutical Company in the Year 2020

Source: dailyeventnews.com
c. Pharmaceutical Export

The pharmaceutical industries of Bangladesh provide 97% of the total requirements of drug of the local market. Though the country is in a beginning stage, after meeting local demand this industry exports medicine to global market including Europe. Bangladesh is exporting their pharmaceutical products in Singapore, Myanmar, Bhutan, Pakistan, Nepal, Oman, Thailand and some other countries of Africa also. It also has a large market in European countries (Mohiuddin, 2019).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Export in Millions US$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014-15</td>
<td>69.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015-16</td>
<td>72.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016-17</td>
<td>89.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017-18</td>
<td>103.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018-19</td>
<td>130.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Export Promotion Bureau (EPB)
The Unethical Practices in Drug Promotion of Pharmaceutical Industries in Bangladesh

As per the code of pharmaceutical marketing practices Subject to Clause 19- 2, ‘No gift or financial inducement shall be offered or given to members of the medical profession for purpose of sales promotion’. Directory of Drugs Administration, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare Government of People’s Republic of Bangladesh, Article 19 of the Ethical Criteria for Medicinal Drug Promotion of the WHO says, ‘Employers should be responsible for the statements and activities of their medical representatives. Medical representative should not offer inducements to prescribers and dispensers. Prescribers and dispensers should not solicit such inducements.’

Article 7.5.1 of the Code of Practice of International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers and Association says, ‘Payment in cash or cash equivalents (such as gift certificates) must not be provide or offered to healthcare professionals. Gifts for the personal benefit of healthcare professionals (such as sporting or entertainment tickets, electronic items etc.) must not be provided or offered.’

But the original picture of promotion of pharmaceutical industries in Bangladesh is absolutely different. Pharmaceutical industries of Bangladesh are in an aggressive mad rush to promote their medical products. It is seen that the promotional activities of the pharmaceutical industries consume a mentionable part in their total budget (15%-25%). Even in the third world countries this rate is higher. These types of aggressive promotional activities of the pharmaceutical industries cause a threat to professional ethics because due to such aggressive promotion the prescribing behavior of the physicians is manipulated and thus many physicians may get deviated from their sacred task that is helping the patients. To promote their products, most of the Bangladeshi pharmaceutical companies are in a competition of an unethical practice. Often they offer the doctors different sorts of gifts so that the doctors may prescribe their medicines and their gifts to the doctors range from free samples to cash to household items to overseas trips to attend a conference to stationary and what not?

The industry sources say that for the gift purpose to the medical practitioners different pharmaceutical companies in Bangladesh allot a handsome amount of money. In rural areas many a time companies provide the physicians there with TK 5,000 – 10,000 monthly with a view to promoting their drugs. In city areas the amount of disbursement for the same purpose is much higher. Though the pharmaceutical companies are spending a huge sum of their budget to the physicians to promote their drug in terms of gifts in different forms, ultimately the consumers are getting burdened as the companies recover the expenditure by increasing the prices of the drugs.

On the prospect and challenges of the pharmaceutical industry in Bangladesh, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) published a study. This study shows that for marketing purpose more than TK. 6,000 crore has been spent by the pharmaceutical companies in Bangladesh in a year. The study also reveals that in 2018 this sector spent 29.6% of their total turnover on marketing, where the total drug market was worth TK. 20511.88 crore that year.

The Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies says, a large sum of this marketing expenditure is spent by these companies for physicians in the forms of gifts. These types of activities of the companies in Bangladesh are quite unethical by local and international laws and policies. This unethical practice also puts a tremendous negative effect on the whole industry. As a result the extra burden is carried by the consumers as they are to pay mandatorily more for medicines. The experts say if such unethical promotion could be stopped, drug prices would drop by 70%.

**Impacts of Unethical Promotions**

In our country, mentality of making excessive profit and illegality in business is increasing day by day. Ethical practice in business in Bangladesh is not satisfactory. Every day we can see a lot of negative news in the dailies. A number of people are getting sick and dying from tainted medicine. Moreover the unethical practices in promotion of pharmaceutical industries have increased the load.

- The unethical promotion impacts on the prescribing pattern of physicians. The physicians compelled to prescribe particular medicine whether there is a necessity or not, and equally effective alternative is available or not. This type of activities causes unnecessary cost and harms to the patients in the form of side-effects and complications.
- The cost of unethical marketing promotion is borne by the society through raising costs of drugs and long waiting time while visiting physicians for treatment.
- The physicians are losing their honesty and integrity. Moreover they are involving themselves in unethical practices and running after money (in the form of gifts).
- The patients are losing their faith on physicians and moving to neighboring countries for better treatment.
- The worldwide famous companies which were marketing medicine in our country are leaving Bangladesh due to unethical promotion of local companies that results in reducing the competitive mentality of pharmaceutical companies and lower the quality of medicine.
- More over promotion of low quality medicine causes death in many cases. The ethical mentality of manufacturers of medicine can save from this devastating consequence.
V. RECOMMENDATIONS

➢ To protect such unethical practice in promotion of drugs different countries in the world have passed laws. Bangladesh should also have such types of laws to implement strictly.
➢ Under these circumstances, in accordance with the international standard laws and WHO guidelines Bangladesh government should make necessary correction in the code and laws on drug promotion so that they can have control over the pharmaceutical industries.
➢ To ensure consumers’ right to medicines at equitable price, the government, more specifically the Directorate General of Drug Administration, should have a proper mechanism to monitor so that they can stop any unethical practice effectively.
➢ To stop unethical practice in drug industries is to ensure the rights of people. So in the Drug Administration more manpower should be recruited with a view to making more effective ‘Code of Drug Promotion’
➢ Enlightening the health professionals on ‘code of pharmaceutical promotion’ and building awareness on medicine prescribing ethics is very essential. Besides regulatory movement by professional and statutory bodies to check unethical promotion of drug is required.
➢ Motivating physicians to prioritize patients’ interest over pharmaceutical companies’ interest and encourage rational use of medicine are required.
➢ Motivating physician and other healthcare providers to refuse gifts in the form of cash or kinds.

Moreover, the positive motivation and ethical practices of pharmaceutical companies and consciousness of physicians can play a great role in this regard.

VI. CONCLUSION

In fact Bangladesh has gained almost self-dependency in the supply of medicine for the demand of their country. Only a very little amount of high tech medicine is being imported nowadays. But it is being noticed optimistically that the local drug industries have also initiated producing such medicine in Bangladesh. In near future this production will certainly help Bangladesh reduce the import of high tech medicine. In addition Bangladeshi medicine and healthcare products are being exported to more than 100 countries around the world and playing an important role in export earnings. This paper focused on the unethical practices in promotion of pharmaceutical industries in Bangladesh. The main objectives of the study were to identify the unethical practices in promotion of drugs by the pharmaceutical industries in Bangladesh, to highlight the impact of unethical practices on the sustainable growth of pharmaceutical industries. The study exposed the unethical drug promotion creating unnecessary health hazard, increasing cost of drugs, putting impacts on the prescribing pattern of physicians, degrading the honesty and integrity of physicians and finally the worldwide famous companies leaving Bangladesh due to unethical promotion of local companies. All result in reducing the competitive mentality of pharmaceutical companies and lower the quality of medicine. Finally this study recommended some proposals to overcome the present condition. Undoubtedly the local producers are capable of manufacturing medicine of good quality. A potential possibility of growth is there for this promising sector in Bangladesh. So, the pharmaceutical companies should come out of the unethical promotional activities to ensure the sustainable growth of this promising sector and contribute to the economy of Bangladesh.

REFERENCES