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## Govt. lowers stent price cap again

Fearing action, hospitals implement new rates without delay; feeling the pinch, say distributors

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After capping the prices of stents used in heart surgery exactly a year ago, the National Pharmaceuticals Pricing Authority (NPPA) has reviewed the ceiling price of the widely-used drug-eluting stent (DES) and brought it down by ₹1,710 to ₹27,890. However, the price of bare metal stents, used far less, has been hiked by ₹400 to ₹7,660. The new prices will be valid till March 19, 2019.

The reduction in DES prices on Monday has caused confusion in the medical equipment market, doctors and hospital authorities said. After capping stent prices in February 2017, the Charity Commissioner and the NPPA had taken action against hospitals found overcharging patients for stents.

**Prompt implementation**  
This time, healthcare providers have ensured that the new prices are implemented immediately. "A patient re-

**HEART MATTERS**

Revised ceiling prices (excluding GST)

**Drug-eluting stents**  
₹27,890  
(cheaper by ₹1,710)

**Bare metal stents**  
₹7,660  
(costlier by ₹400)

**No sub-categories in drug-eluting stents**

- Trade margin capped at 8%
- Prices of catheters, balloons, wires etc. to be mentioned in bill
- New prices valid till March 31, 2019

quired two stents for an angioplasty on Tuesday. We charged him the revised rates, and GST of 5% was charged separately as per the notification," Dr. Rajendra Patankar, chief operating officer, Nanavati Hospital, Vile Parle, said.

The Asian Heart Institute (AHI) in Bandra too implemented the new prices. "Our administration and billing department were intimated immediately about the revised costs," an AHI spokesperson said.

Dr. Prince Surana, director, Surana Group of Hospitals, said the cut has sent a ripple through the market. "With inflation high, no one was expecting further reduction in prices. A price cut of ₹1,700 isn't much, and won't benefit anyone. It has only led to discontent in the industry. We've written to stent companies, requesting them to give us credit notes for the difference paid by us on stents." He said four angioplasties were performed in his hospital, and the patients were billed as per revised prices.

**Distributors unhappy**  
On Tuesday, representatives of a multinational device manufacturing company reached out to hospitals to say their distribution model will be reviewed following the price revision. They said removing the distributor and supplying devices directly to hospitals was being considered. A city-based distributor said, "With the distributor's profit margin capped at 8%, it has been difficult to sustain for a year now. The new prices will hit us again."

Healthcare providers say distributors play an important role in the supply chain.

For instance, when hospitals demand a certain size and type of stent at short notice, a distributor sources it from his stocks. This way, the hospital doesn't have to stock stents in large numbers.

Before the price cap was imposed for the first time last year, bare metal stents would cost up to ₹8,000, drug-eluting ones between ₹50,000 and ₹1.6 lakh, while biodegradable stents were priced at ₹1.9 lakh. The last were taken off the market soon after the price cap. There was apprehension that high-end stents won't be available, but the market settled gradually.

Dr. Abhijit More, health activist and co-convenor, Jan Arogya Abhiyan, said, "The efforts of public sector doctors, who presented a fair picture to the NPPA about the results of certain highly-priced stents, must be lauded. It's great that the NPPA has given first preference to the consumer for the second consecutive year."