



Made-in-India drugs based on weed soon

Cancer Pain Management, Epilepsy Meds In 1 Yr

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New Delhi: New hemp-based medicines for cancer pain management and epilepsy treatment that will be manufactured in India are set to be available in one year with the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) in advanced stage of clinical trials to launch two breakthrough drugs.

The move to produce medicine formulations that incorporate hemp lend a fresh reputation to the otherwise controversial cannabis, which can also be abused and has potentially harmful psycho-altering qualities.

The two new drugs are expected to be superior than the existing line of treatment. For instance, morphine is currently used for pain management in cancer patients and while it can be habit-forming, cannabis-based drugs will not be.

They can also help address nausea and enhance appetite in patients undergoing chemotherapy.

For trials related to cancer pain management, CSIR's Indian institute of Integrative Medicine (IIIM) has tied up with Tata Memorial Hospital, whereas tests for the epilepsy drug will be conducted in New Delhi's AIIMS. Ratan Tata-backed cannabis research start-up,



Bombay Hemp Company (Boheco), is CSIR's funding partner for the two research projects and is expected to market the drugs in India.

The two medicines are based on cannabidiol (CBD) — one of the two primary compounds occurring naturally in the cannabis sativa plant. CBD is non-psychoactive, meaning it will not deliver a high to the user. The other compound is tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). Such drugs are being used in the US and Europe but their distribution in India will bring down the cost of the formulations currently needing specific clearances.

"Cannabis is a very useful crop. Unfortunately, there is a lot of misconception surrounding it because of its misuse which also excluded this plant from research for a very long time," CSIR-IIIM director Ram Vishwakarma told TOI. He was speaking on the sidelines of a conference organised by CSIR and Boheco to

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discuss aspects of the crop.

Cannabis-based drugs for cancer pain management and epilepsy have been approved in the US and Europe. However, Indian patients can only import them based on special permission from doctors. Since these medicines are exorbitantly priced, very few patients can afford them. Once the drugs are manufactured in India, the prices are expected to decline significantly.

"Since these drugs are already available in the US, we only have to do bio-equivalence studies and we have already begun the process for the same. Advanced studies to prove efficacy on Indian patients will take six months and regulatory approvals another six," Boheco co-founder Yash P Kotak said.

The other drug for epilepsy is also considered superior than the existing line of treatment as it is targeted at 30% of the epilepsy patients who do not react to the first and second line of drugs.