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After 15 years, Parkinson's drug all set to enter Indian market

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Bengaluru: Fifteen years after being in use in western countries, a drug with proven efficacy against Parkinson's disease is set to enter India. Apomorphine, much sought after by neurologists, is awaiting clearance from the Drug Controller General of India to be sold here.

Dr NK Venkataramana, renowned neurosurgeon, attributed the delay in the drug's availability in India largely to its suffix: morphine. "This is the only injectable drug which is available for treating Parkinson's but its suffix must have played spoilsport. We have, on many occasions, requested the government to make the drug available in India but Apomorphine was seen as a derivative of the narcotic morphine and has not been not available so far," he explained.

UK-based Britannia Pharmaceuticals, which manufactures the drug, has tied up with Vikram Hospital, Bengaluru, for initial distribution. The drug, which comes in the form of injection and infusion pump, is popular in the UK, US and other western countries.

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"It stimulates the nerve cells in the brain and provides quick and effective relief to patients, improving their quality of life," said Dr Prashanth LK, neurologist and Parkinson's disease and movement disorder specialist.

"We will finally make it to India, though it is very late compared to the drug's availability in other countries. An injection with 3ml of the drug is likely to be priced at Rs 1,500-2,000," said Robert Wood, director, Britannia Pharmaceuticals.

Currently, the only two options for Indian patients are to take oral medication or go in for deep brain stimulation surgery (DBS) if they are in advanced stages. DBS is an expensive option (Rs 10-15 lakh), where elec-

trodes are placed deep inside the brain through small holes in the skull and are connected to a battery-powered stimulator placed on the patient's chest. The process stimulates the brain.

Dr Prashanth said the drug would spell relief for many patients in India. "Apomorphine can be recommended in cases where oral medication is not effective for long," he added.

Dr K Ray Choudhury, clinical director, National Parkinson Foundation Centre of Excellence, King's College Hospital, London, said the drug is much in demand as even one shot can bring dramatic relief within a couple of minutes and enable patients to get back to work. He said there are instances of Indian patients travelling to the UK only to get this drug.

Dr Pramod Pal, head of department of neurology, Nimhans, said the development can ease the woes of many patients and their caregivers. "The medicines currently being used in Parkinson's treatment come with their own side-effects in the long run. We are not sure how patients coming to Nimhans can be made to access Apomorphine," he said.