

Availability of Medical Abortion Drugs in Modern Retail and Online Pharmacies

Background

Modern retail, online pharmacies and physical chain pharmacies are increasingly playing an important role, especially in urban areas in sales and distribution of pharmaceutical preparations. Pratigya Campaign and Foundation for Reproductive Health Services India's studies among conventional chemists in 10 states showed that in six states (Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, and Tamil Nadu) an overwhelming majority of chemists reported not stocking of medical abortion (MA) drugs. The stocking was quite low in Delhi and satisfactory in Assam, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. In Tamil Nadu, a significant majority of chemists also reported not stocking Emergency Contraceptive Pills (ECP) with 90% of those not stocking reporting that ECPs have been banned in the state. **To fill the information gap on availability of MA in modern retail, a telephonic survey and in some cases online survey was conducted among retail chains and online pharmacies between July-August 2020.**



Methodology and Sample Size

Top 11 chain pharmacies were contacted on phone to check if they stock and sell MA drugs. 48 outlets spread across eight cities (Bengaluru, Chandigarh, Chennai, Delhi, Kolkata, Lucknow, Mumbai and Pune) were called anonymously and were asked if they were stocking MA drugs.

Eight online pharmacies/portals were contacted to find out about availability of MA drugs. All these portals requested for prescription, which was uploaded and answers were received through chatbots or were computer generated.

1 Findings: Online Pharmacies

In total eight online chemists were contacted. The online chains contacted were: 1 mg, Netmeds, Phrameasy, Easy Medico, Practo, Emedix, Medlife and Apollo.

Only **two online pharmacies** – Apollo and Easy Medico, showed availability of MA drugs. Easy Medico had Mankind Pharmaceutical's Unwanted Kit and Apollo showed availability of Aristo Pharmaceutical's Mifty Kit.

Medlife and Emedix responded that they do not have MA drugs in their 'list of medicines.' Others shared that 'it was not for sale' or showed errors.

All these online portals required the user to upload the prescription, and after a lag of a few seconds, responses were generated. While in some, chat-bots replied that combipacks are not in their 'list of medicines,' and 'not for sale,' some generated an 'error in query.' The error we assume is due to unavailability.

2 Findings: Retail Chain

2.1 Availability of MA drugs

60% (29 out of 48) of modern retail chemists do not stock MA drugs at all (two from Bangalore, one from Chandigarh, two from Chennai, 12 from Delhi, one from Kolkata and 11 from Maharashtra). 15 outlets were currently stocking and four indicated that they can make it available on order.

Of the 11 retail chains contacted, two (Nobel and Muthu based out of Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu respectively) did not stock it in any of their outlets. One (MedPlus) had it in three out of four outlets in Delhi and eight other chains had it in some outlets, not all. Coincidentally, the eight retail chains stocking in some of their outlets, did not stock in their outlets in Chandigarh and Maharashtra at all but were stocking in some outlets in Delhi, Bangalore and Kolkata. Lucknow seems to be the only city, amongst modern retail chains, where MA drugs are stocked.



2.2 Reasons for not stocking

38% (11 out of 29 outlets) mentioned that they are not authorised to stock or sell MA drugs and only hospital pharmacies and/or doctors are allowed to stock and use/sell these drugs.

One chemist cited heavy documentation requirements. Three chemists said it is illegal in their state and/or they are banned, interestingly these chemists are three from Maharashtra and one from Tamil Nadu.

Five chemists cited supply issues from the company's end or short supply from their warehouse.

Remaining nine, did not cite any reason for not stocking.

2.3 Requirement of Prescription

Of the total 19 retail chain chemists (15 stocking and four that reported that they can make it available on order), 16 mentioned the requirement of prescriptions for selling MA drugs, only three shared that prescriptions are not required.

2.4 Most Commonly Stocked Brand

Mankind's Unwanted Kit was the most common brand stocked across the states. 17 out of 19 were stocking Mankind's Unwanted 72; followed by Mifegist and Clearnews. Most chemists reported stocking only one brand.



Conclusion

As with conventional chemist outlets, it appears that modern chemists' channels also seem to be wary of carrying MA drugs. A large number of them seem to think that MA drugs cannot be sold by chemists and a few think it is banned. It appears that the regulatory hassles, which seem to be the main barrier for conventional chemist, seem to be impacting modern retail chemists channels too. As an increasing number of people, take to buying from modern channels, it is important to ensure that these channels stock MA drugs.

In a situation like the current pandemic, where mobility is restricted and clinics and facilities not are fully operational, availability of MA drugs in online stores/modern retail can help increase access to safe abortion. The policy environment needs to be conducive and encourage modern retail and online pharmacies to stock and sell MA drugs, so that clients can order from the comforts of their homes.

No of Retail Chains Surveyed			
S No.	Pharmacies	Location	No of Outlets
1.	Apollo	Delhi Lucknow Chandigarh	4 1 1
2.	98.4	Delhi	8
3.	Guardian	Delhi	5
4.	MedPlus	Delhi	4
5.	Sanjivani	Delhi	4
6.	Noble Plus Pharmacy	Mumbai Pune	6 2
7.	Med Polo	Bangalore	3
8.	Frank Ross Pharmacy	Kolkata	1
9.	Lifeline Pharmacy	Kolkata Delhi	1 3
10.	Generi Cart Medicine	Mumbai	3
11.	Mutthu Pharmacy	Chennai	2

Total Sample: 48 chemists

Authors:

VS Chandrashekar
Debanjana Choudhuri

Click here for [Availability of MA drugs across Markets of Six Indian States](#)

Click here for [Availability of MA drugs across Markets of Four Indian States](#)