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Fact Sheet

Regulating e-pharmacy: challenges and opportunities for access and quality of care in LMIC health systems – November 2023

The George Institute for Global Health — India

Facts:

- The e-pharmacy market is burgeoning rapidly. In 2018, the global online pharmacy market was estimated at US$49.7 billion and is expected to grow to US$178 billion by 2026.

- The Indian e-pharmacy sector alone was estimated at more than US$370 million in 2019, growing to US$2.1 billion in 2023.

- There are around 20 local firms conducting e-pharmacy in Kenya. In India, where the market is larger, estimates vary at between 50 to over 100 providers.

Project Cycle:
2022-2025

Partners:
London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, London, UK

Strathmore Business School, Nairobi, Kenya

Supporters:
Health Systems Research Initiative (UK MRC, FCDO, Wellcome Trust)

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Background:

- The recent growth of the e-pharmacy business, especially in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), presents both risks to the public and opportunities to enhance access to health care.

- Regulatory systems - crucial in managing these risks and opportunities - are hampered by a lack of consensus on appropriate approaches and lack of national regulatory frameworks.

- Analysis of LMIC e-pharmacy markets from a health systems perspective remains very limited.

Aims:

- To address the knowledge gap by assessing the performance of e-pharmacies in India and Kenya and analysing the regulatory systems for improving medicine quality, safety and accessibility through four distinct work packages (WPs).

- To improve the quality, safety and accessibility of medicine provision.

Methods:

WP1: Characterise e-pharmacy markets in each setting by reviewing e-pharmacy websites and conducting in-depth interviews with e-pharmacy staff.

WP2: Assess the quality, safety and affordability of medicine provision by e-pharmacy providers.

WP3: Critically appraise current regulations by mapping regulatory frameworks and exploring alternatives through in-depth interviews with various stakeholders.

WP4: Study past and ongoing policy processes influencing the design and implementation of regulations through document review and stakeholder interviews.

Impact:

- This research may help guide policy makers, regulators and other stakeholders on approaches for strengthening e-pharmacy regulation.

- Clear and locally appropriate information materials on identifying trustworthy providers and using online services safely will be developed, which will be communicated through media, online channels and local non-government organisations.

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