

Responsible dispensing

Karnataka is also working on tighter regulations and responsible dispensing of drugs. This will ensure antibiotics are dispensed only with valid prescriptions, thereby discouraging over-the-counter medications.

In August this year, a survey conducted by a research team from St Joseph's University, headed by Dr Raghavan, revealed that nearly 80% of the 108 pharmacies where a "test-purchase" drive was conducted sold antibiotics over-the-counter.

"Out of the remaining 20% who refrained, one out of three did not sell because they did not have stock. Also, over 50% of these 108 pharmacies did not give us a bill until we insisted. A quarter of these were handwritten," Dr. Raghavan said.

"Although the pharmacists were aware that over-the-counter sales in a punishable offence, fear of losing business (as customers can easily purchase the drugs from another pharmacy) and familiarity with the customer (which prompts the pharmacist to maintain trust and relationship with the customer) are among the reasons for them to do so. Besides, lack of easy access to healthcare, which drives customers/patients to seek help from the pharmacist directly and lack of awareness among customers of the legal and health consequences of purchasing and using antimicrobials without a prescription also contribute to this menace," she explained.