

The Launch of Bangladesh's Accredited Pharmacy and Medicine Shop Initiative—Working with Country Stakeholders to Improve the Quality of Pharmaceuticals and Services in the Private Sector

Background

Access to quality medicines and pharmaceutical services is an essential component of good health care. However, many people in developing countries do not have regular access to essential medicines, and many who do have access receive the wrong medicine or not enough medicine or do not use the medicine correctly. A potential solution lies with the most commonly used source of medicines in many countries, including Bangladesh—the private sector drug seller. To improve access to affordable, quality medicines and pharmaceutical services in retail drug outlets, such as pharmacies and medicine shops, a holistic approach is needed that combines changing the behavior and expectations of those who use, own, regulate, or work in retail drug outlets. For shop owners and dispensing staff, this can be achieved by combining training and enforcement of clear regulatory standards with efforts to affect customer demand for and expectations of quality products and services.

Initiative Launch

The Bangladesh accreditation initiative was launched in November 2015 when MSH received a grant from the Joint Donor Technical Assistance Fund to provide technical assistance to the Directorate General of Drug Administration (DGDA) to design an accredited drug seller model for Bangladesh.

This initiative is being implemented in three distinct phases. All phases must involve key public and private sector stakeholders so that the plans, processes, and materials reflect country program needs and buy-in. The three phases are as follows—

Phase 1: Develop Bangladesh pharmacy model and implementation strategy, processes, and materials, including standards, laws and regulations, regulatory and inspection capacity, and program oversight

Phase 2: Implement and evaluate the Bangladesh pharmacy model in target districts (pilot phase)

Phase 3: Scale-up final model nationwide and ensure sustainability and maintenance without ongoing donor support

Initiative Summary

Since the start of Phase 1 activities in November 2015, the Bangladesh accreditation initiative has made significant gains in marshalling the support of stakeholders to lead the development of pharmaceutical regulations and standards and an accreditation implementation strategy. One of the first steps was to engage stakeholders, including the MOHFW, DGDA, Pharmacy Council of Bangladesh (PCB), Bangladesh Association of Pharmaceutical Industries (BAPI), Bangladesh Chemist and Druggist Samity (BCDS), Consumer Association of Bangladesh (CAB), Dhaka University, BRAC, and others. Two initiative-related committees have been established: the National Steering Committee provides oversight and policy guidance, while the Technical Management Committee provides input to the initiative's implementation, monitoring, and supervision.

With input from the two committees, DGDA has defined two levels of retail drug outlets: Level 1 Pharmacies and Level 2 Medicine Shops. The standards for each level of service cover the premises infrastructure, personnel training and qualifications, operations including services that dispensers are allowed to provide, and the products that dispensers are allowed to sell. Pharmacies

and Medicine Shops that meet these standards will be allowed to display a special logo that shows consumers that the outlet has been accredited under the new initiative.

In addition to the new standards, stakeholders have helped draft an implementation strategy for the initiative that cover major components such as dispenser orientation and training, economic incentives and microfinance for owners, information technology, inspection, and consumer advocacy and sensitization.

Having nearly completed Phase 1, the initiative will build on that framework as it transitions into Phase 2, which will be the implementation and evaluation of the Bangladesh model in select upazilas. In preparation, all upazilas of seven districts and one thana of Dhaka city were mapped to collect data on the numbers, types, and locations of facilities that prescribe and dispense medications as well as on the qualifications of their dispensers and the conditions of the premises. Based on the evaluation of the pilot under Phase 2, the model will be finalized for nationwide scale-up under Phase 3, with existing drug outlets in the districts being scaled up having one year to meet the new standards.

Initiative Benefits

By requiring private sector pharmacies and medicine shops to meet accreditation standards, the benefit of the government's initiative will be improved consumer access to and appropriate use of quality medicines and pharmaceutical services; greater consumer awareness of the importance of using medicines appropriately and the need for vigilance against fake and substandard medicines; DGDA's strengthened regulatory oversight of the provision of pharmaceutical services in pharmacies and medicine shops; expanded employment opportunities; and improved health outcomes for Bangladesh citizens.