

## **karnataka Govt asked KPSC to fill vacancies of Drug Inspectors**

BENGALURU: The next time you are at a medical store, ensure that you are getting medicines from a qualified pharmacist. In the last four years alone, the Karnataka Drugs Control Department has cracked down on 664 errant medical stores across the state. And this, despite the department not conducting enough inspections.

Statistics show the department has cancelled licences of 12 chemists and suspended licences of 652 others across the state from 2012-13 to 2015-16.

Officials say action has been initiated under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, for various violations including operating without a qualified pharmacist, poor record keeping of sales, dispensing medicines without prescription and non-maintenance of a record of drugs falling under Schedule-H1 (all types of higher antibiotics).

It was revealed that the number of inspections conducted by the department has dropped from 777 in 2012-13 to 250 in 2015-16.

As a result, the number of licences of errant medical stores suspended has also come down from 777 in 2012-13 to 250 in 2015-16.

Health experts say 1,774 inspections in four years is meager as there are nearly 32,000 retail and wholesale medical shops across the state.

In contrast, the Maharashtra Food and Drug Administration conducted inspections of more than 25,000 shops across the state in 2014-15 alone.

State drug controller B T Khanapure said they are taking action against errant chemists based on complaints.

“We are taking stringent action against chemists who sell medicines without prescription of a medical practitioner and also those who are dispensing medicines without prescription in the absence of a qualified pharmacist.”

Sources say the department is short-staffed as it has only 32 drug inspectors as against the sanctioned strength of 112. This number is insufficient to monitor more than 32,000 retail and wholesale medical stores across the state.

“We have asked the Karnataka Public Service Commission (KPSC) to fill the remaining vacancies of drug inspectors to enable us to conduct effective raids,” said Khanapure.

A member of the Karnataka Chemists and Druggists Association (KCDA) said most medical stores are struggling to get qualified pharmacists.

“Experienced pharmacists are demanding huge salaries which are not feasible for most medical shop owners in the state. Several families are dependent on these medical shops, but the authorities are turning a blind eye to the online sites that are delivering medicines without any prescription,” he said.