

The Star : Good time to fix a ceiling price for drugs

Written by Administrator

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THE two letters [Price of healthcare will be doubled](#) (*The Star*, Sept 15) and [Another ruling that will surely push up the price of medicine](http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2007/9/19/focus/18925852&sec=focus) (*The Star*, Sept 19) has given rise to concerns about increasing drug costs.

The Consumers Association of Penang (CAP) appreciates the fact that the Health Ministry's Director of Pharmaceutical Services, Datuk Che Mohd Zin bin Che Awang has acted quickly to allay concerns.

Che Zin has given a detailed explanation of what the requirement for maximum pack sizes entails, and the reasons for proposing this measure, in his letter [Why the dispensing packs](http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2007/9/20/focus/18939185&sec=focus) (*The Star*, Sept 20).

The maximum pack size scheme, if implemented properly, is expected to ensure that containers, bottles and caps that are used in repacking medicines are clean, and that there will not be any contamination due to improper handling during the re-packing process.

In addition, the move would also minimise the risk of errors in the handling and labelling of medicines, especially if staff that are not qualified or not properly trained to carry out these tasks.

Che Zin has assured the public that the plan to implement patient dispensing packs will be carried out sensibly and that the authorities will strive to ensure a balance between cost and the safety and quality of the product.

Although CAP believes this is meant to indicate that any price difference for the smaller packs will not be burdensome, we are still concerned. Some manufacturers and distributors may take this opportunity to impose unjustified increases in costs.

CAP calls on the Health Ministry to act to fix a ceiling on price increases following the switch to smaller packs.

Overall, CAP urges the Ministry to fix a ceiling price for drugs on the Malaysian market. This would be a good time to impose price restrictions for this group of products that should, in effect, be viewed as essential goods.

There are already price controls for medical procedures under the Fee Schedule of the Private Healthcare Facilities and Services Regulations 2006 and it is reasonable to expect that there should be some form of control over medicine prices too in order to contain the overall costs of healthcare.

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