

MSD announces entry of Keytruda in India

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US biopharmaceutical giant Merck, Sharpe and Dohme (MSD) has launched its blockbuster cancer drug 'Keytruda' (pembrolizumab) in India around a year after it first received approvals to market it. The drug has so far only been approved here for a less prevalent type of cancer, while it is marketed in countries like the US to treat additional indications like a specific kind of lung cancer.

Keytruda, hailed as a 'gamechanger' therapy in oncology, is expected to help the immune system identify and selectively combat only cancerous cells instead of aggressively attacking cancer cells and risking healthy tissues in the process like existing therapies. The drug generated global sales of \$1.4 billion during 2016.

The Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) gave MSD permission to market Keytruda in June 2016. Keytruda is expected to be 30 per cent cheaper than the global prices and cost Rs 3.75-4.5 lakh for each dose. The drug was launched in the US in 2014 at a price of reportedly \$12,500 for each patient monthly or \$150,000 annually.

Oncologists expect MSD to approach the apex drug regulator to extend its approval for Keytruda to additional indications, including Non- Small Cell Lung Cancer, now that it has launched the product here.