FDA Maharashtra: Ensuring Quality at Every Step

The Food and Drug Administration, Maharashtra, completely understands that eating out is a common phenomenon. A plan is underway to implement quality check for all street vendors, restaurants, big restaurants chains and hotels. Training schedules have been planned for the entire Maharashtra, and in the next two months 50,000 people will be receiving training under it, says Dr Pallavi Darade, Commissioner, Food and Drug Administration and Food Safety, Government of Maharashtra, in conversation with Harshal Desai of Elets News Network (ENN).

What kind of initiatives FDA, Maharashtra has undertaken? How will you take these initiatives further?

Over the years, Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Maharashtra has established itself as an influencing governing body. The practices followed by the institution are emulated across the country. All the initiatives undertaken by the organisation have been proved to very positive and comprehensive. Be it related to drug development or food safety, the organisation has been at the forefront of bringing best practices on the table. In the last four to five months, after I assumed the role of commissioner, we have carried out few more initiatives. One of such projects is related to the quality of ‘Prasad’ that is distributed to the people at various religious places. We have recently undertaken a project under which we have trained about 300 ‘Mandir Trustees’ on preparing ‘Prasad’ and ‘Mahaprasad.’ We had undertaken a project at the famous Siddhi Vinayak Temple in Mumbai to ensure the ‘Prasad’ is prepared in more blissful and hygienic manner.
We also ensured the use of scientific processes and better labelling of the ‘Prasad’ offered to devotees. We provided guidance to authorities for three to four months, and as a result, the ‘Prasad’ is now accepted by US FDA. The success of the project encouraged us to extend the campaign across the state. The campaign was properly framed. We appointed nodal officers and trainers to ensure the success of the campaign in a timely manner. We trained about 3,000 people during our campaign. The campaign also included ‘Gurudwaras.’ This first-of-its-kind initiative was highly appreciated by the Chief Executive Officer of FSSAI and authorities in the Central Government. In total, we have so far organised about 150 different workshops and training programmes to train more than 26,000 people in both food and drug businesses.

What about the street food vendors and restaurants?
We completely understand that eating out is a common phenomenon. We are planning to implement the similar process for all street vendors, restaurants, big restaurants chains and hotels. We have already planned training schedules for the entire Maharashtra, and in the next two months we will be training about 50,000 people. We will be doing a full-day presentation as to what our actions are all about. We will hand them over checklists and ensure they follow it diligently. We also run campaigns during festival seasons to check the quality of sweets being sold in the market.

Would you brief us on the recent directive related to Schedule M drugs?
We had realised that some manufacturers were not meeting the compliances for Schedule M drugs. There are about 40-50 compliances which need to be followed, but some units were not following and adhering to these standards. We have now made it compulsory to file the schedules to us after complying with all the conditions. This step will allow the manufacturers to adhere to manufacturing standards and ensure complete quality control. Here, we tried to bring the focus on the compliances within factories. Secondly, we have made similar checklists for druggist, chemists and pharmacies to ensure implementation of the best practices.

How FDA is making the most of IT and Digital Transformation?
We are the only FDA in the world to issue WHO GMP certification online. We have recently received recognition for this at the Food and Pharma Summit organised by Elets Technomedia and Gujarat’s Food and Drug Administration. We are further
extending the software provided by Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). We also have received approval from the Department of Information Technology. All the activities related to prosecution, inspection – anything and everything done by FDA Maharashtra – will be available online. We are launching the pilot in Mumbai and Thane. Again, this extension of the software has been appreciated by the officers in Delhi. A great digital revolution has happened in FDA. Digital transformation not only helped us streamline the operations but also increased transparency.

**What is the significance of the Pink Book released by FSSAI?**

‘The Pink Book: Your Guide for Safe and Nutritious Food at Home’ is guidelines for home use. It educates you on how to store raw food at home, how to cook food, healthy eating habits, packaging techniques used for food, the various hygienic practices. This is prepared by FSSAI. We are trying to distribute it to maximum people.

**How do you rate the current Lab infrastructure?**

Lab infrastructure is improving. We are extending the Mumbai Lab on the fourth floor at our Headquarter. We are also in the process of building a microbiology lab here at the cost of about 4.5 crores. We are building a new campus in Aurangabad which will be completed by March 2018. We have received the approval to build a 17-crore project in Nagpur. We wish to have robust laboratories in all our seven divisions. We will also be receiving new lab instruments by the Government of India. Besides, we have also got approval to add 17 vehicles in our fleet under the upgradation process.

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**Do we face manpower issues in FDA, Maharashtra?**

It has been an issue. We, however, have started appointing Food Safety Officers. We have promoted officers and also reviewed the suspensions of several others. About 100 people have been appointed in the last four months. We have already asked for 400
drug inspectors to oversee the compliance to the Drugs Act in their respective jurisdictions. Thus, we are determined to strengthen the workforce.