



# Right prescription

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## **Right prescription-The Delhi High Court restores the retail sale and private manufacture of a life-saving drug**

- In a crucial development that exposes the flaws in health policy-making in the country, the Delhi High Court quashed a government ban on the retail sale and private manufacture of oxytocin.
- Notified by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in April, the ban referred to a 2016 Himachal Pradesh High Court judgment, which discussed oxytocin's misuse in dairy cattle, fruits and vegetables.
- However, soon after the order was issued, health experts pointed to the absurdity of it.
- Oxytocin is a life-saving drug used to stem post-partum bleeding among new mothers.
- Because of this it had been listed by both the World Health Organization and the Health Ministry as an essential medicine.
- Around 45,000 women die from post-partum complications in India each year, and in 38% of the cases the reason is haemorrhaging.
- Without the easy availability of inexpensive oxytocin, efforts to stem the maternal mortality epidemic could have suffered a costly setback.
- These worries led to the All India Drug Action Network (AIDAN), a patient-rights group, to challenge the order in the Delhi High Court.
- The court found that the government had failed to weigh the danger the ban posed to thousands of young mothers.
- What is more, it had failed to show that the drug was widely misused for veterinary purposes, the purported reason behind the order.
- The most damning observation in the judgment is that the Centre focused on the health of milch animals, without considering the well-being of women.
- This was despite the fact that all statutory bodies, including the Drugs Technical Advisory Board, had advised against a ban.
- This episode ought to compel policy-makers to reflect on the process that led to the ill-conceived order.

- It is time for a post-mortem of how health policy is made, because that is the only way to safeguard the right to health of Indian citizens.

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