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ASIA EDITION

Novartis China surrounded by bribery allegations

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Singapore: Even as Big Pharma in China is surrounded by bribery allegations and investigations were just initiated against French drug maker Sanofi in the country, yet another scandal is unfolding. A former sales representative of Swiss drug maker Novartis has made shocking revelations against the company's operations in China. The company is alleged to have offered bribes to doctors in some Chinese hospitals to drive sales for one of its oncology medicines.

As per a report published in the 21st Century Business Herald, the saleswoman identified by the pseudonym 'Li Li' used to work for Novartis. She claimed that she was ordered by her manager to secure $104,839 of sales of Novartis' Sandostatin LAR by providing 'funds' to doctors. She said that the sales targets of Sandostatin LAR, that is used to treat rare cancers of the stomach, intestine or pancreas, were raised every month.

She further was reported to have said that she had started having a feeling that she could not achieve the sales target for July and her superior advised her to give kickbacks to doctors prescribing five doses of Sandostatin LAR and secure 50 doses of sales by spending 50,000 yuan in June and July. She said these sales targets were hard to meet under 'ordinary practices,' meaning medical training for doctors to raise their awareness of Novartis drugs and thus lift sales, the news report said.

She further revealed that she was also asked to persuade doctors to prescribe the drug to patients with off-label diseases, or illnesses not included in the list of those targeted by the medicine.

The report further quoted Li Li as saying that she had filed for a termination of her labor contract with Novartis in Beijing after she had not received a proper response to her request to resign.

Responding to this, Novartis released a statement claiming that the saleswoman had started work in its oncology business unit in January this year and was in charge of sales to major hospitals in northeastern China.

Novartis further stated that it was dealing with the resignation according to China's Labor Law and company regulations yet the employee had made a claim for compensation in the amount of 5 million yuan at the end of July.

The company is quoted as saying that it would take disciplinary action if there was any misconduct or infringement of its own regulations and Chinese law.