

THE HINDU Business Line

Doctors and drugs on the go

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MEDICINE IN THE MALL

Chennai, June 24:

Need a pill for that splitting headache after hours of shopping? Are shopping bags and crowds — and not to forget, the prices — making you giddy and you need medical attention? Don't panic, there is help right inside the mall.

Healthcare players are discovering the unique retail and branding opportunities that shopping malls provide.

Dr Lloyd Nazareth, President and COO, Fortis Hospitals, which runs a medical centre at the Mantri Square mall in Bangalore, says that apart from providing basic aid to shoppers for minor ailments such as a fall or injury, the centre also connects with shoppers through health camps and awareness programmes. "It is a good branding opportunity, with the mall footfalls being high," he says.

According to Mr Jonathan Yach, CEO, Propcare Mall Management, which manages Mantri Square, since 35 per cent of its shoppers are from a 6 km radius catchment, the medical centre helps create awareness about Fortis in the neighbourhood. Apart from shoppers, the medical centre sees an average of 50 staff of the mall and the shops going in for a simple check-up each day.

Both mall owners and service providers benefit. With time at a premium, people are looking for one-stop-shops for all their needs, which a mall fulfils — from luxury goods to groceries to entertainment. Healthcare completes the circle. That said, malls are more suited for preventive healthcare than prescriptive healthcare," says Mr Yach.

Several pharmacy chains such as The Medical Shoppe, Guardian Pharmacy and Doctors Pharmacy have branches in malls such as InOrbit, Korum and Nirmal Lifestyle in Mumbai and Express Avenue in Chennai. Mr Ashutosh Garg, CMD, Guardian Lifecare, says, "With the Indian consumer buying behaviour changing, it makes sense for us to be present in a mall where shoppers are willing to spend more time."

While impulsive buying may not happen, people are turning to the mall-pharmacy for planned purchases. "If you are diabetic and need medicines for the next six months, you would opt for a mall-pharmacy for the easy access it offers," says Mr Sushil Dugarwal, Chief Mall Mechanic, Beyond SquareFeet, a mall management consultancy.

Moreover, pharmacy stores nowadays offer a wide range of cosmetics and wellness products, apart from medicines.

And it is not just in the urban centres.

The Apollo chain runs a pharmacy and a pathological lab at ITC Choupal Saagar, a rural mall at Mhow in Madhya Pradesh.

Today, 3-5 per cent of mall space is devoted to services — mainly related to health and hygiene, such as a pharmacy, gym or a salon. It will go up to 10 per cent in five years, says Mr Dungarwal.

“While the mall does provide good visibility for healthcare players, there is also the risk of dilution of a ‘serious’ brand image,” cautions Dr Sameer Khan, Senior Vice-President — Healthcare, Technopak Advisors.

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