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"Our R&D emphasis is to develop automated platforms"

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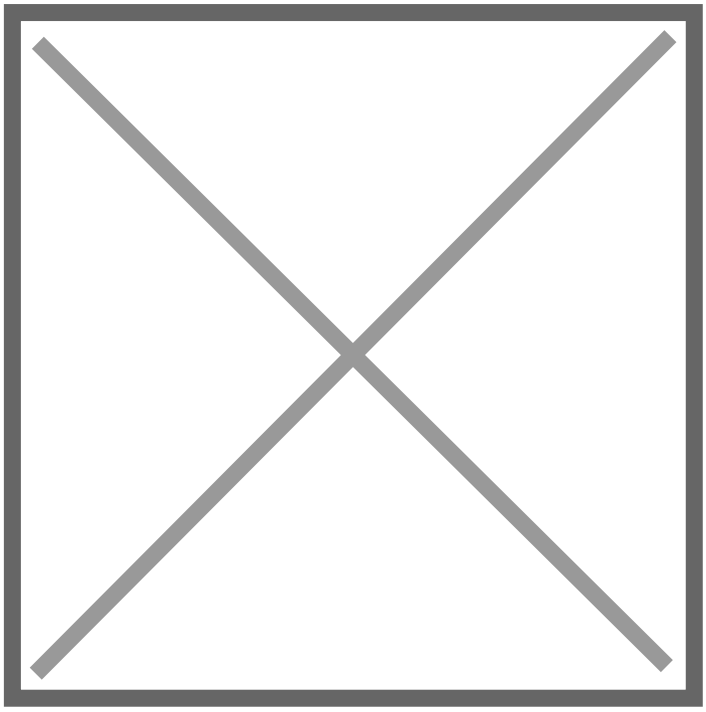

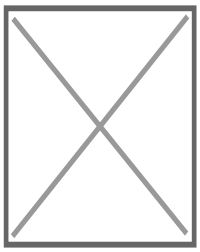

Dr Pradip K. Desai
founder chairman & director

Leaving his flourishing career as clinical pathologist, Dr Pradip Desai decided to turn into an entrepreneur and the time has proved he was right.

After receiving his MBBS degree in 1961 and MD (pathology) in 1965, Dr Desai started his career in 1966 as a clinical pathologist in Surat, Gujarat. Arising out of necessity perceived by the frustrating experience due to highly-restrictive import policy with punishing levels of custom duty prevailing in 1970s, Dr Desai was motivated to start a company named, Desai Clinical Laboratories, as a diversion from his busy and flourishing clinical laboratory practice. The company was renamed as Span Diagnostics in 1976.

The goal was to indigenously develop and manufacture a comprehensive range of ready-made diagnostic products needed by clinical laboratories in India. From the beginning, emphasis was laid on in-house R&D to develop affordable products, keeping the customer need in focus and quality under constant vigil. Today, Span Diagnostics is one of the most reputed IVD manufacturing companies in India.

Under his leadership, in the beginning Span Diagnostics offered diagnostic solutions for typhoid, tuberculosis, syphilis and blood grouping reagents, which were burning need of that era. Clinical chemistry reagents were given importance in 1980s. In early 1990s, Span introduced ELISA for HBsAg and HIV-1 which were the first indigenously manufactured commercial ELISA test kits in India. Thereafter Span licensed technology from PATH, US, and introduced rapid test for HIV in the comb format which have been used extensively by all segment of laboratory in last two decades and have greatly contributed to NACO’s efforts to control the spread of HIV.

At present, the company's R&D focus is on upgrading the quality and performance of its existing products to maintain the parameters in line with the international standards. These efforts are further enhanced by collaborative development and licensing of technologies from reputed Indian Institutions such as AIIMS, Anna University and University of Delhi, South Campus as well as foreign Institutions such as PATH, US; CDC, US; and Pasteur Institute, France.

Commenting on the future R&D plans of the company, Dr Desai says, “The focus is mainly on the point-of-care tests and molecular diagnostic tests. Since, automation and instrumentation is the demand of recent times due to its acknowledged role in reducing chances of human errors and increased efficiency, our R&D emphasis is on development of automated platforms on which HIV, HbsAg, HCV, and thyroid hormones can be tested by using the most sensitive measurement technologies. The IVD industry is in the inflection position and different business models are likely to emerge by multiplexing the technologies.”

The dynamic leadership of Dr Desai helped Span Diagnostics to achieve remarkable growth in its overall performance for the financial year 2009-10. The revenue of the company has increased to $18 million (82 crore) in the year 2010 as compared to $5 million (207 million) in 2001. The company has strong presence in domestic market with blood banking, infectious disease, clinical chemistry and hematology products. It has more than 50 percent market share (in terms of number of tests) in HIV, HCV, tuberculosis, syphilis, typhoid and malaria. Span Diagnostics has significant market share in blood grouping reagents, clinical chemistry reagents, rheumatology and hematology.

Rahul Koul in New Delhi