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Biotech students connect with industry at SLS 2013

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The BioSpectrum student lecture series organized at Shoolini University started with a thunderous applause from the hundreds of students who arrived from the various corners of Himachal Pradesh. The theme of the event held on February 27, 2013, was focused on exploring entrepreneurship and corporate opportunities for the aspiring students in the biotechnology sector. This initiative of BioSpectrum magazine, a publication of CyberMedia group of companies, has already been held in past at Bangalore, Mumbai and other major cities of India.

In his opening speech, Prof P K Khosla, Vice Chancellor, Shoolini University stated, "We decided to align with BioSpectrun to bring the student community closer to industry. We thought of giving a chance to students to directly listen to industry and have an interaction with the industry leaders."

Prof Khosla stated further, "We have been living in a cocoon without any significant interaction with the companies so far. But now we have to realize that this sector won't do better without any knowledge on industry."

Narayanan Suresh, Group Editor, BioSpectrum and MIT's Technology Review gave an overview on Indian bioscience industry.

"Most of the students are not aware about the happening in the industry. BioSpectrum presents a topical picture of the sector to all the stakeholders including the biotech student community. It feels great to be the part of this initiative and disseminate information to the students in this remote part of the country", said Mr Suresh.

Mr Suresh further spoke on the relevance of the sector these days. "The drug discovery presents great opportunities in the research and the drugs are very vital for the diseases such as cancer. There are at least six distinct verticals within the sector and these include biopharma, bioagriculture, bioservices, bioindustrial, bioinformatics and biosupplier business. The major clusters are located in Bangalore, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad and NCR. The companies every year invest close to Rs 3,000 crore in various areas of research, marketing and manufacturing. It costs millions to get a new drug into the market. That means it is not an easy job but given its impact, the sector deserves utmost care and nurturing. The personalized medicine, healthcare for aging, contract research and manufacturing and biosimilars are the next big trends in the sector at present."

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Shoolini University in the previous year has been ranked at number two in the private university rankings by BioSpectrum biotech school survey that is held annually.
In his address to the students, Dr Rajeev Soni, Associate Vice President, Biocon India, Bangalore and Founder Premas Biotech, Manesar, spoke on the various opportunities in biotechnology and the latest trends in biologics area.

"I will speak to you today about what it takes to be an entrepreneur. It requires a BRICK. The 'B' in the brick stands for the belief and in real sense it is self belief. The 'RI' stand for the risk taking capabilities. However it has to be kept in mind that we cannot take the blind risk though it is necessary. 'C' stands for the change and that means the change in mindset. Change is one thing which is constant and with that we can change our and other's lives. 'K' stands for know thyself. One has to be aware about self needs and aspirations. I would say 'Be yourself'."

Mr Sahil Kapoor, Director-Global Business Operations at Novo Informatics, New Delhi talked about the big world of informatics and its relevance in the bioscience industry. He cited many examples to tell students about various opportunities available in the bioinformatics sector.
"The importance of this bioinformatics in the computer aided drug discovery has been immense. The use of various softwares and databases to perform the molecular docking and further predict the nature of target molecules is highly relevant in present times", opined Mr Kapoor.

Mr Pankaj Sharma, CEO, Director and Co Founder- LeadInvent, New Delhi, spoke about trials & tribulations of a bioscience entrepreneur. He listed out the must do's for the potential entrepreneurs among the students.
Talking further about the entrepreneurship, Pankaj stated, "The passion about doing what your heart says and going ahead with their own idea despite the hardships is the strategy of an entrepreneur. The perception does matter a lot in deciding the course of action in the business of entrepreneurship. The feedback on what you plan to do and what have already initiated, is an important part of a long term strategy. Selling of an idea has to be instant and constant too In that context, there is disconnect between the students and the faculty that teaches them. This gap has to be bridged to achieve the greater results."

While talking about the nuances of biosupplier business in India, Mr Manu Grover, Product Manager for Pharma Business, Waters India, Bangalore, spoke about the potential opportunities in this technology enabling industry. "There is growing demand for the biosimilars in India. 21 out of 100 top selling drugs are biosimiars. Biosupplier area has been expanding

rapidly and the opportunity areas are mainly in instrumentation, manufacturing, distribution, diagnostics. The specific qualifications are required for the potential candidates to get absorbed in the biotech industry. The knowledge base is very important here. Along with the basic degree, you will require specific expertise in one area. The industry of course is highly competitive and students have to take their course and studies very seriously to stay relevant.", stated Mr Grover.

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Making students aware about the opportunities and career options, Mr Kapil Jhawar, Senior Clinical Project Manager, Quintiles India, Ahmedabad, mentioned, "In clinical research business, the understanding of whole process of how drug discovery happens and the knowledge of clinical trials process is very important. There are lot many opportunities in this area for the bright candidates."

Mr Jhawar in his very interactive session with students also guided them about various stages of applying for specific jobs within the industry and getting recruited. He advised students to take the studies seriously as the completion in biotech industry is very high.
The end of each session saw students participate in an interactive Q &A session.

The vote of thanks was presented by Prof J M Julka, Professor, Shoolini University, who was highly appreciative of the participation and enthusiasm shown by the students. The event concluded with a closing address by Mr Suresh who insisted the students make the most of the wide array of opportunities that are available. The event concluded with a cultural programme that was enjoyed thoroughly by the audience.