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"We are in India to access the research talent"

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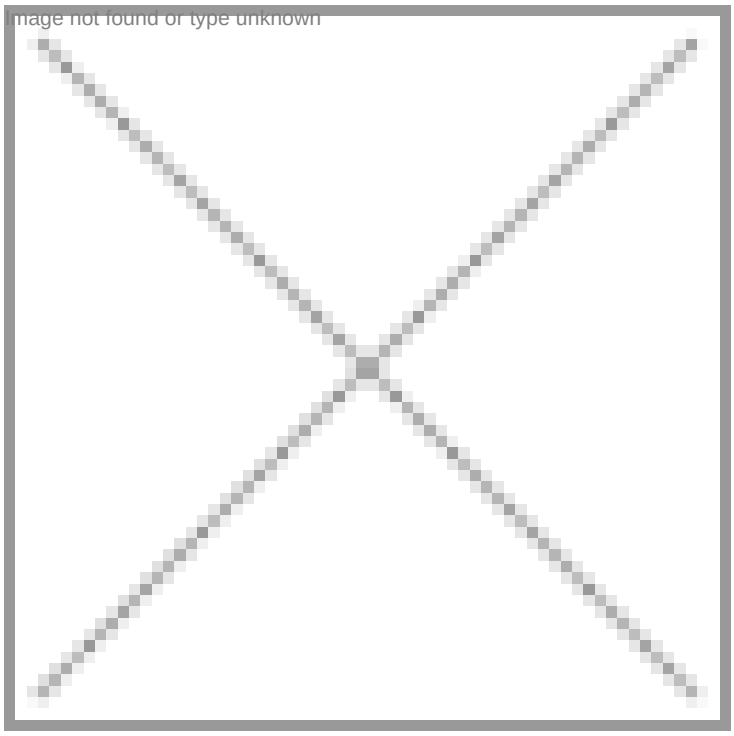

"We are in India to access the research talent"

Jan Lundberg has been heading the global research activities of the $26.5-billion AstraZeneca as the executive vice president (discovery research). A medical doctor and an accomplished researcher with over 500 scientific articles to his name, Lundberg was in Bangalore to inaugurate the new process R&D center of the company. He took time off to discuss with BioSpectrum Editor Narayanan Suresh, the importance of India in the company's research strategy which now focuses on "molecules in need" globally.

AstraZeneca already has research centers in Europe and the US. Why are you doing more research work out of Asian centers like that in Bangalore and Shanghai?

The company has made some strategic shifts in the research areas to concentrate on developing molecules in need widely around the world for major patient populations. So we have chosen to focus on tuberculosis (TB) at the center in Bangalore and cancer translational research in China. We have to be here to gain access to the talent available in these countries to do a large part of the drug discovery research. The Bangalore center has more than 100 researchers and the numbers will grow to nearly 200 in a short time. The Shanghai center is small right now with about 70 researchers.

What is the difference a center, such as the one in India, will bring to the table?

We could have done a lot of this work in Europe. But from India, we will be able access the talent, reach out to a range of key

partners required in developing a drug against TB like academia, researchers and patients. We were highly impressed by the work done by the team in India in the early years and so we set up the process R&D center here itself.

This kind of work requires a high level of passion and we find that in plenty along with talent in India. Since we are focused on developing a drug to cure a disease widely prevalent here, the motivational levels of the team involved is very high. With the recent advances in information technology, it is easier to connect teams working across the world faster, share their skill sets and leverage our technology platforms. This requires people with lots of skills in bioinformatics and that is available in plenty in India.

How is the research work on TB progressing?

The last major drug against TB was developed in the 1960s. Tuberculosis is different from many other bacterial infections. We are trying to understand the behavior of the organism better to be able to predict the onset of the disease. We are hopeful of good news in 2-3 years.