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Strengthening disease monitoring systems with technology

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Although over the last few months the startup space saw a rough time as funding ran low for many, few of them have been supporting the healthcare infrastructure and strengthening disease monitoring systems with innovations enabled with technology. On a positive note, there has been a massive increase in the uptake of innovations. As a result, healthcare startups are making their strategies for the coming year. BioSpectrum brings to you plans of the startups for 2021.

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“Looking to expand and adding new verticals”

From an industry or consumer angle, the pandemic has made it very evident that customers are moving online faster than ever before. As a tech-first healthcare provider, DoctorC is at the forefront of this market transformation that's happening in the healthcare space. The pandemic has led to a rapid expansion of the company across verticals. Before the pandemic, we were a team of 150, today we are nearly 300. We are currently in 10 cities and are looking to expand to 20+ cities in 2021. We are also adding new verticals beyond diagnostics.

Neehar Cheerabuddi, Chief Executive Officer, DoctorC, Hyderabad

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“Investing another $20M for expansion”

Owing to the unprecedented demand for our mobility & virtual healthcare services, we are investing another $20 million to add a 20 plus new services for our subscribers. This strategy will propel our growth in health tourism for international patients, urban crowds and more importantly provide underserved regions access to our exclusive services. Besides mobility services, we will roll-out home diagnostics, doctor, nurses and nutritionists’ consultation on call. Plans are underway to expand our Intelligent Monitoring Analysis Services Quarantine (iMASQ) services, offer no-cost ambulances for the needy, and subsidised services across healthcare in partnership with hospitals.

Dharma Teja Nukarapu, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Vera Smart Healthcare, Hyderabad

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“Bringing diagnostics to a device on your palm”

We have made significant investments in R&D to develop innovative products to change the face of diagnostics in India and at globe. To start with, we plan to launch the v 2.0 of Compact XL - the molecular lab in a box concept. This version would integrate the PCR capabilities into the current model, further improve the design and a major facelift. This machine will allow small labs to set-up and conduct molecular tests without incurring a huge capital cost and save on the referral samples they outsource to bigger labs. Further, small blood banks will also be able to take benefit of this and do NAT testing in-house. We will also roll out the truly mobile molecular labs, which can travel to villages and small cities to test for various types of infections and diseases. Further, we are planning to bring a complete range of new tests that would allow us to improve diagnostics for COVID as well as other infections. These tests will be more accurate that the current paradigm and will match the current costs. Finally, there are two important projects that are still in our labs, driven by cutting edge technologies, which have the potential to bring diagnostics to a device on your palm.

Hasmukh Rawal, Managing Director, Mylab Discovery Solutions, Pune

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“Digital maturity and innovation at forefront”

2021 would be the year of renewal, digital maturity and innovation. It is an exciting time for our industry as well as for CORE Diagnostics. Innovation and the use of advanced technology would continue to be amongst the top trends in India as well as

across the globe. There has been a visible shift of consumers from brick-and-mortal to digital services. We believe end-to-end doorstep delivery of diagnostic services will come up as a major trend. In terms of infrastructure, the smaller labs have limited financial capabilities for advanced equipment. Hence, organized players are expected to register higher growth along with consolidation and acquisition of smaller labs by established ones. The large scale public-private partnership, one of the significant developments in our industry this year, is also expected to continue and further grow in varying models in the year 2021.

Dinesh Chauhan, Chief Executive Officer, CORE Diagnostics, New Delhi

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“Raising funds & expanding our footprints”

COVID-19 happened out of the blue, impacting almost every sector. For a player like us that deal in the digital arena, it worked to our advantage. Pharmaceutical brands had been very hesitant in adopting digital technologies, but the pandemic provided the required push for Rx drug marketers to look for digital avenues and adopt digital methods to stay relevant to Physicians not just at times like these, but also to optimize their business outcomes in the future as well. COVID-19 has made one thing crystal clear for the pharma sector that digital is here to stay, and any marketing strategy would be incomplete without it. In the year ahead, we are aiming at raising funds and expanding our footprints to South Asian and European markets, besides launching new features that bring effectiveness and efficiency in pharmaceutical marketing.

Dr Harshit Jain, Founder & Chief Executive Officer, Doceree

“Deepening our diagnostic network”

The pandemic has proven that telemedicine is not only a tool for patients with non-critical emergencies, but can also be an effective tool to ensure continued care for patients afflicted by chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, etc. In 2021, we will be scaling up our presence across key cities in India, partnering with strategic hospitals that would enable high quality Outpatient Department (OPD) care to be accessible to an even greater number of patients. We plan to expand our doctor network as well as deepen our diagnostic network across the country. We would also be creating detailed continuous care programmes for several chronic conditions prevalent in India- such as diabetes, Polycystic Ovarian Disease (PCOD), thyroid, hypertension to name a few.

Prasad Kompalli, Chief Executive Officer & Co-Founder, MFine, Bengaluru

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“Expanding scope of our data science”

We plan to continue working on our AI so that it becomes even more efficient in decoding the health data and identifying illnesses and diseases faster. We also plan to extend our suite of services in the future to provide consumers with a holistic platform for all their healthcare needs. We are especially expanding the scope of our data science to ensure Dozee can accurately predict specific disorders, esp. in neurology, pulmonology and cardiology space.

On the hospital front, we are seeing good traction this year and we have partnered with over 30 hospitals already. We are planning to scale across the country and have our devices at many more wards. Currently in India, only one lakh beds are being continuously monitored and there are about 19 lakh beds, which are dependent on human intervention. We hope to bridge this gap in the coming years. We are also targeting Tier II cities as the doctor to patient ratio is extremely skewered here and having our device in such regions will ensure that hospitals run efficiently by automating the vitals monitoring process.

Mudit Dandwate, Chief Executive Officer & Co-Founder, Dozee, Bengaluru

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“Expanding into AI based digital capabilities”

SeekMed has gained significant traction in building itself as a credible global tele-medicine platform for professional and ethical medical advice. As we look at 2021, we'll continue to build on the momentum and focus on expanding our footprint on all fronts- establish SeekMed as the platform of choice for second opinion; expand geographic outreach outside India; expand into AI based digital capabilities for targeted patient education and tele-medicine offerings; grow our network of most admired super specialist doctors by 150 per cent and explore tie-ups to broaden our value-based offerings; and expand tie ups with all major hospital chains of India.

Alok Awasthi, Founder, SeekMed, New Delhi

“Reaching out to everyone in rural India”

While 2020 was a challenge, 2021 is not going to be easier. At least the initial two quarters of the year will still be consumed in recuperating the businesses and going back to normal. The telemedicine sector has a lot to emphasize on and build an ecosystem that is healthier, safer and digitally equipped to attend all sorts of medical needs. Tattvan provides primary healthcare service and advanced healthcare opinion in rural areas and small towns, tier-2 and tier-3 cities. We are continuing with the same motive to make it a bigger revolution in the healthcare industry and reach out to everyone in rural India with our best services.

Ayush Mishra, Chief Executive Officer, Tattvan e-clinics, Gurugram

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“Continuing exploring global collaboration”

We were thrown into the pandemic without the tools we needed. Not enough diagnostic kits, ventilators or state-of-the-art sanitization technologies. That is when C-CAMP instituted the C-CAMP Innovations Deployment Accelerator (C-CIDA) to

harvest world-class innovations growing in our own backyard. However, niggling issues remained like the bottlenecks in the supply chain of key reagents, enzymes, Active Pharmaceutical Ingredient (APIs) and other crucial kit components that go into the making of a RT-PCR kit. Even as India's vaccine development programme is nearing clinical approval, enzymes are short of supply. A case of the 'missing reagent' aptly sums up our current situation. C-CAMP is anchoring two major programmes to change this scenario- National Biomedical Resources Indigenization Consortium (NBRIC) and Rockefeller Foundation supported Indigenization of Diagnostics (InDx) programme. InDx is helping scale up manufacturing capacities for indigenous diagnostic kits to effectively meet the country's testing needs. A million test kits a day is the programme's promise. From straining to perform a few thousand tests, nationally, we are now aiming for a million a day. In 2021, we will continue to work towards bringing world-class innovations to society and to explore collaborations to bring global perspectives to India's bio innovators and bio researchers.

Dr Taslimarif Saiyed, Chief Executive Officer & Director, Centre for Cellular and Molecular Platforms (C-CAMP), Bengaluru

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"Working on expanding beyond India"

The pandemic created an unprecedented challenge to everyone, which in turn triggered innovative thinking. At NIRAMAI, we saw a decline in the number of screenings as women hesitated to walk into hospital OPDs for non-emergency needs. We also did not conduct screening camps for many months in order to reduce crowding during the lockdown. However, the need for breast health will not change. So, we came up with a new way of reaching out to people directly by launching our home screening service in partnership with home care providers. Since we work in thermal imaging, which is a mandatory COVID-19 screening requirement, we innovated on the product front too. We launched a new product for automated temperature screening called Niramai FeverTest. Niramai is now clinically proven and established itself as an expert in breast health in many cities. In the coming year, we plan to scale up our services pan India to provide Niramai test in many more cities and focus on creating further awareness about breast health in women. We also plan to work on expanding beyond India.

Dr Geetha Manjunath, Chief Executive & Technology Officer, Niramai, Bengaluru

"Planning to enter APAC market through partners"

We have recently introduced our first range of novel COVID-19 diagnostics products in the form of RNA Wrapr. It is a molecular transport medium for COVID-19 sample collection, developed as part of the COVID-19 response team from Indian Institute of Science. RNA Wrapr inactivates the virus immediately only preserving DNA/RNA content required for RT-PCR tests. The product is safe to handle even during unexpected accidental spillage or handling errors. Developing countries can collect samples in centres without BSL2 or BSL3 certifications. It is priced at Rs 99 in India, aligned with the price of one litre of petrol, to help the diagnostic centres upgrade from viral transport media (VTM) to molecular transport media (MTM). We plan to enter the APAC market through partners with $9 and $6 pricing plans per test. Azooka is striving to provide a safer molecular grade transport medium that is at sub Rs 100. We are appealing to a segment of users, who care about the safety of their frontline healthcare workers.

Dr Fatima Benazir, Co-founder & Chief Scientific Officer, Azooka Labs, Bengaluru