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Womenâ??s Day Special- Dr Priti V Warke

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Starting her career as an Assistant Scientist in Himedia, Dr Priti has risen to the levels of director taking one step at a time



Women worldwide make up for less than 33 per cent of researchers, says a UNESCO Science report. With India lining up for becoming the next hub of bioscience research, its women leaders are already making their mark on the global reach ecosystem. Having said that, there can't be a more suitable time to recognise their contributions.

One such exceptional leader is, Dr Priti V Warke, Director, Cell Culture & Plant Tissue Culture businesses, HiMedia Laboratories. She also heads the Regulatory Affairs. Being a leader, assuming multitude of roles comes naturally to her and she keeps excelling in each one with equal zest and spur. Starting her career as an Assistant Scientist in Himedia, Dr Warke has, risen to the levels of director taking one step at a time, and has very effectively maintained a healthy work life balance. She moves towards her goal to make a difference in lives of people through the use of science & technology, thus keeping her humane side alive.

Dr Warke has been actively involved in R&D, operational and administrative activities of the Cell Culture business. She has been instrumental in starting the stem cell and regenerative medicine division in HiMedia. Presently, she is actively involved in developing serum free media, assay kits, cells required for manufacturing of monoclonal antibodies for cancer and COVID-19 detection kits.

Apart from handling the business hum-drums, Dr Warke is an avid yoga practitioner and guides people through yoga, helping them enhance immunity. Her journey is, most certainly, inspiring for many women today.

As we celebrate Women's Day on March 8, BioSpectrum reached out to Dr Warke to find out more about her experience in 2020 while fighting the pandemic-

What have been your key contributions within the organisation towards fighting COVID-19?

At the outset, I would stress on the fact that tackling the pandemic and lockdown was more teamwork than an individual feat. However, my role in making decisions to arrange human resources, logistics, investments and roll out of the products into the market via right channels was crucial.

Our principle product during this pandemic was the Viral Transport Media, a mandatory sample collection kit. The number of VTM units manufactured till the end of 2019 did not cross 500 thousand test units per year, as opposed to the requisite of one million test units per day during the pandemic.

The challenge was to make a decision pertaining to mass production and supply of VTM double time since HiMedia was the only supplier of VTM during the initial months, thus, leaving no scope for delays. I jumped in and immersed myself into working 24/7, focusing on ramping up the production process and within 15 days, we increased the production capacity to one million test units per day. Today, I can say that, in the past many months, HiMedia was able to provide over 20 million VTM tests for diagnosis of COVID-19.

Additionally, in collaboration with Syngene, we have successfully developed ELISafe 19 TM – an antibody based ELISA kit for COVID and also developed COVIDSafe, a Virus Inactivation Transport Medium.

How have you been able to tackle the pressure created by the pandemic?

I had to take an all-inclusive approach to tackle the pressure as everyone was equally concerned. We had stopped production of all other products and singularly focused on mass production of VTM, which was the need of the hour.

In doing so, a proper distribution of work became easier as per expertise. We divided the work in shifts to meet the requisite production capacity. Stay, food and daily needs of workers were provided for workers staying in the production premises throughout the lockdown. Safe transport was arranged for employees.

Increase in production capacity meant more need to human resources. We conducted incentive driven hiring and bulk recruitments. I made sure I attended to the mental health of employees by guiding them through yoga and providing healthy diet charts.