

Molbio's TrueNat TB gets BioSpectrum Product of the Year Award 2020

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TrueNat TB, a new molecular test that can diagnose Tuberculosis (TB) in one hour as well as testing for resistance to the drug rifampicin, developed by Molbio Diagnostics has been awarded BioSpectrum Product of the year award 2020. Sriram Natarajan, Chief Executive Officer, Molbio Diagnostics, Goa received the award at a virtual ceremony held in March 2021. The ceremony witnessed the participation of over 200 industry leaders from across the country.

TrueNat TB uses a sputum sample taken from each patient. Only about 0.5 ml of the sample is required compared with about 1 ml needed for the American GeneXpert machine. With this test, samples can be tested as soon as a patient with symptoms of TB is seen. As the entire set-up is both battery operated and portable, it can be used in the most basic parts of the healthcare system. This is where this test differs from GeneXpert, which is most suitable for being used where several tests can be done at the same time.

In his acceptance speech Sriram Natarajan, Chief Executive Officer, Molbio Diagnostics, Goa said, "TrueNat started as a dream 15 years ago to see how high quality, molecular diagnostics can be reached across the country right up to the first point of contact at the primary level. Today TrueNat globally is the only point of care real-time PCR platform that is completely laboratory independent, portable, battery-operated with room temperature stability, ready to use reagents. TrueNat for TB has been validated and endorsed by ICMR and WHO as a frontline test for TB as a replacement for smear microscopy. TrueNat for COVID-19 was amongst the first real-time PCR tests to be approved by ICMR and since then has been at the forefront of COVID testing in India. Today there are 3000 TrueNat users in India and there are 35 countries in which TrueNat is being used for TB. In the coming years, TrueNat is expected to play a very significant, dominant role in the global molecular diagnostic segment."

The standard smear microscopy test for TB has limitations. It usually finds it difficult to diagnose TB when the bacterial load is less than 10,000 per millilitre of the sputum sample, giving erroneous negative results for some patients. The TrueNat kit is 'highly cost effective' as compared to the American GeneXpert. It can be used in peripheral centres without an AC lab and

runs on a solar-powered battery. The GeneXpert machine and the TrueNat machine are designed to be used in different circumstances. The TrueNat machine is more of a point of care machine, which is not fully automated. It is designed for situations where there may not be electricity and where the need is for one test to be done at a time. The GeneXpert is designed for larger volumes and needs a reliable electricity supply. It was also taken up by the National TB Elimination Programme after recommendation by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR). Molbio Diagnostics has received technical assistance and resources from the Geneva-based Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics (FIND) to help commercialise it. Its development has been funded by Bigtec Labs, India.

Besides the Product of the Year Award, a panel of the jury chaired by Dr Renu Swarup Secretary, Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Government of India, has selected other awards namely –Life Time Achievement Award, Entrepreneur of the year award, Woman Entrepreneur of the year award and Business Person of the Year Award at a meeting held at her office in February 2020.

The jury panel includes Utkarsh Palnitkar, Founder & Managing Partner, Aarna Corporate Advisors, US; Dr Gagandeep Kang, the then Executive Director, Translational Health Science & Technology Institute (THSTI), New Delhi (she is now Professor of Microbiology, at the Wellcome Trust Research Laboratory, Division of Gastrointestinal Sciences at the Christian Medical College (CMC) in Vellore); Deepanwita Chattopadhyay, Chairperson and CEO, IKP Knowledge Park, Hyderabad; and Dr Bhagirath Choudhary, Board member of APEDA, Ministry of Commerce & Industry and Founder Director, South Asia Biotechnology Centre (SABC), New Delhi.

Talking about the BioSpectrum Excellence Awards 2020, Ravi Boratkar, Managing Editor and Publisher, BioSpectrum India, MM Activ Sci-Tech Communications, New Delhi said “BioSpectrum awards as we know were constituted in 2003. Unfortunately, the awards ceremony was discontinued in between. However, we used to receive queries and calls. Finally, in 2019, we decided to keep up this good work and acknowledging, appreciating and awarding the exemplary work of individuals and companies in the respective fields with these awards. The actual BioSpectrum Awards Ceremony was organised at The LaLiT Ashok Bangalore, on March 27, 2020. But due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were forced to cancel the ceremony. We hoped to do it at a later date. However now we realised that it will be a time for next year's award. So we decided to go virtually. Hence we thought let's come together and do this programme virtually.”