Developing diagnostics to address AMR

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The Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC), Department of Biotechnology, Government of India and Nesta, a United Kingdom-based Charity managing the Longitude Prize, organized an outreach event recently n New Delhi to promote the Discovery Awards, which aim to create a pipeline of innovations in the Anti-Microbial Resistance (AMR) diagnostics.

BIRAC has committed a funding of GBP 100,000 for the Discovery Awards, to support Indian participants.

The Discovery Awards are seed grants to support teams and individuals to further develop their ideas for the Longitude Prize.

The British government introduced the Longitude Award in 1714 to support scientists to solve the most pertinent challenges affecting the globe.

The current call under the Longitude Prize aims to create a cost-effective, accurate, rapid, and easy-to-use diagnostic test for bacterial infections that will allow health professionals worldwide to choose the right antibiotics for the right bacteria thereby preventing antibiotic misuse and resulting resistance.

"AMR is a serious and rising threat to global public health that requires a concerted effort from different sectors. There is an urgent need to develop rapid and affordable diagnostic tools to enable early diagnosis and identification of drug resistant

strains of infection. Partnerships are crucial for technology development and we believe our collaboration with Nesta on the Discovery Awards will provide the necessary impetus and mentorship to our Indian innovators as they solve the pressing problem posed by AMR," said Prof K VijayRaghavan, Secretary, Department of Biotechnology and Chairman, BIRAC.

"In order to develop affordable, faster and better diagnostics, research and innovation is the key. BIRAC is committed to solving emerging public health issues such as AMR, through innovations and in this regard our partnership with Nesta is of high value since collaborating across sectors can prevent the duplication of efforts and can maximize the resources available" said Dr Renu Swarup, Senior Adviser, DBT, and MD, BIRAC.

In the past few decades, AMR has posed a significant public health challenge across the world.

The occurrence of resistance to the most commonly used antibiotics has resulted in treatment failure, prolonged illness, disability and greater risk of death and skyrocketing costs of care.

The effective management of a number of diseases such as tuberculosis (TB), malaria, HIV and influenza among other diseases, has been compromised due to the emergence drug resistant strains of these diseases.

For example, in the case of TB, globally, 3.5% of new TB cases and 20.5% of previously treated TB cases are estimated to have multi-drug resistant TB.

"Given the urgency and importance of this issue we need a rapid, accurate, affordable point of care test that is accessible to all communities, and will significantly reduce the misuse and overuse of antibiotics. Encouraging and providing the necessary support to medical technology developers is crucial to drive research and development efforts towards this diagnostic tool. The Discovery Awards presents itself as an ideal platform for fostering research and innovation and our collaboration with BIRAC will help us tap into the vast potential available in India," said Ms Tamar Ghosh, Lead, Longitude Prize.

Other participants included representatives from academia, industry and government agencies including Department of Science and Technology (DST), Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR) and Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR).