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“There's a need for bringing in technology to 70,000 hospitals in India”

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With the National Medical Devices Policy 2023 receiving the government's approval, the medtech industry players are further getting encouraged to make India the global manufacturing hub for medical devices. One such player is Germany-headquartered Siemens Healthineers, which has recently inaugurated a new manufacturing facility for Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) machines in Bengaluru. The company has also recently laid the foundation stone for its new campus in Bengaluru, which is a part of its Rs 1,300 crore investment plan up to 2025. In conversation with BioSpectrum, Dileep Mangsuli, Development Centre Head, Siemens Healthineers shares more details about the company’s growth and hiring plans in the medtech sector.

How is Siemens Healthineers driving the Make in India Medtech transformation with the new MRI facility and campus?

I'm a big believer in creating India as an innovation and healthcare hub for the world. There are definitely challenges out there. While we have fantastic tertiary care hospitals in all large cities, if you go to villages, healthcare is still not accessible. And affordability is still a challenge for many people. Although the government has taken a lot of steps in terms of building insurance schemes as well as providing the ability to get the right healthcare possibilities, challenges still exist.

India has more than 70,000 hospitals, and many of these hospitals still do not have all the equipment that is needed to rightly diagnose any disease. There's a need for bringing in technology to these hospitals.

Another point is affordability, which is all about eliminating waste. Globally, the estimated numbers on healthcare waste in the US alone will be in the hundreds of billions of dollars through misdiagnosis and wrong treatments. If you consider global numbers, it will run into several trillion dollars. If that is eliminated, it will bring affordability. It also brings access to all the people and catches the disease early on, and that is what can change the world. That’s where several technologies can help in bringing up affordability, accessibility, and accuracy.

With our new facility, the company will currently manufacture MAGNETOM Free.Star, a disruptively simple approach to high-quality MRI in India. The MAGNETOM Free.Star MRI, which is going to be a game changer for the country as well, is a 0.55 Tesla MRI, which is affordable from the cost perspective and accurate from the diagnosis perspective. And in terms of

maintenance, it takes less than one litre of Helium. Typically, 1.5 tesla MRI requires 1000 litres of Helium. And this takes less than 1 litre. So, that is a big game changer. And this we will be making it in India. Then we have our C-arms, which are being made in India, and they are sold in 54 countries today. We are looking at expanding our manufacturing footprint also. We are already making computed tomography (CTs) in India for the local market as well as South Asian markets. We are going to be looking at more products in the coming years. We are building our new campus into a very large manufacturing site. Also, this will be our integrated site for manufacturing, Development Centre as well as our headquarters function. This will be the largest campus of Siemens Healthineers outside Germany. So, we are not only looking at 'Make in India' for India, but we are looking at 'Make in India' for the world.

With the new products being developed within India, for the world, are there specific disease areas or challenges being targeted, to improve the healthcare delivery in India?

Our company came together with Varian, which is a cancer specialty company. We acquired Varian and today Varian and Siemens are one company. Varian is known for its ability to manage cancer from end to end from early detection, to therapy, to post-therapy management of patients. That is a strength that we find is very strong and very relevant for us. There are three diseases which are actually making the world today a challenging space- cancer, cardiovascular diseases, and stroke. India is the capital of these diseases.

About a year and a half back, we came together, about 70 leaders of the company, to talk about what should we be doing for managing these diseases. Two things that emerged were that we need to really look at these three diseases as a growth vector and try to address technologies around that. Secondly, we need to look at the healthcare access part.

For example, not every hospital has a great radiologist. I know of one hospital in the northern belt of Karnataka where there is only one doctor who looks through a lot of patients. He can't see every scan. But with technology, a lot can change. But there are challenges such as skill set and funding which need to be addressed. Today, technology can be made available everywhere but the right skill that is required to interpret that technology is missing. The data that is shown by a lot of equipment or technology, needs someone to interpret it properly. Today, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not allow artificial intelligence (AI) to be used for interpretation. It can be used for verification, but you need to still interpret it. So, skill is a challenge. I think building skills is something that has to be of foremost importance for many of the companies to look at. We are focusing on that in a big way and also want to partner with the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), in building this.

Are you hiring more skill sets for the new facility and campus, especially the PhDs in the life sciences sector?

We have several doctors working here, several radiologists, people working on software and digital technologies, and many others who have a PhD. They come from the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) and the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs). What we are looking at as a company is to make it into an innovation hub. It is not about what happens in those four walls of a building that we construct, but it is about what happens with the ecosystem around us, i.e. the academicians, large hospitals and startups. One thing that excites me about the ecosystem in India is that the hospitals are becoming even more open and more willing to work on research topics to co-create possible new workflows or a possible new way of treating cancer or a possible new way of identifying what is a better way of treating cancer. Yes, we are looking at growing the teams, bringing in technologists, and bringing in people who have a passion for healthcare. It is not only about technology, it's about passion for changing the world. That is what we are looking at.

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