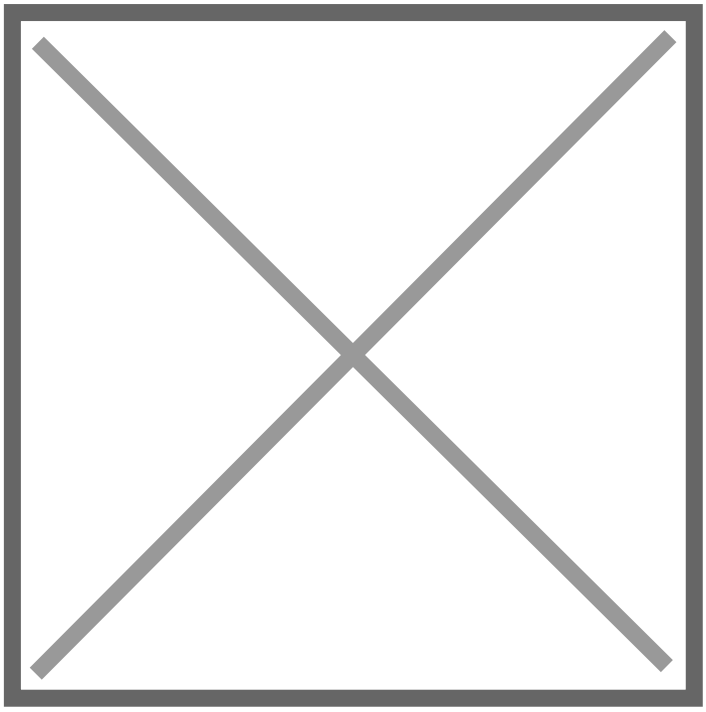
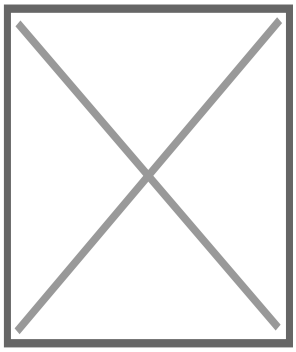
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'We will target biotech research market'

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Mr Sunit Trivedi, director
BD Biosciences, India

Becton Dickinson (BD) India's Biosciences division has come a long way since the establishment of India's first ever flow cytometry training center in the year 2003. BD has created its own market for cell analysis and flow cytometry under a very niche umbrella. BD Biosciences recently completed the acquisition of Accuri Cytometers, a US-based company that develops and manufactures personal flow cytometers for researchers.

In an exclusive interview with BioSpectrum, Mr Sunit Trivedi, director, BD Biosciences India spoke about the opportunities, challenges, competition and future.

Q What were the challenges BD faced as a biosupplier?

Among the challenges, the entire payment procedure and the tender process is very bureaucratic. Also, corruption is rooted deep inside the system. All these issues need proper attention and immediate redressal. The procurement process has to be simplified and made easier for the scientist to buy his product of choice. Also, there are certain products that have specific requirements for transportation. The products that need to be stored at -80 and -20 degree Celsius sometimes perish because of lack of proper cold storage facilities at the airports. The custom clearance must be quick for such products as it might perish in inappropriate conditions in two-three days.

I also feel that pharma R&D should have more subsidies and rebate should be given on the 15 percent tax being paid by pharma companies doing R&D including CROs.

Q How has the recent takeover of the Indian companies by the US majors helped?

There is a need to take these takeovers positively. These companies have been acquired because they are doing something innovative at the local level. The taking of innovative technologies to the global level will certainly help the Indian economy to grow in the long run.

Q What kind of acquisitions and new partnerships has BD done in the recent times?

We keep acquiring companies from time to time. Recently, we acquired Accuri Cytometers, a US company targeting scientific people looking for personalized flow cytometers that are cheap and easy to use. The acquisition expands BD's presence into the emerging affordable personal flow cytometer space and helps expand the use of flow cytometer technology. Therefore, this takeover of Accuri which has a fantastic range of products with benefits such as compactness, easy-to-use, and affordability will address the concerns of this segment. The cost of high-end analyzer that costs around $100 thousand will now be cheaper by 50 percent.

We will also run a corporate social responsibility (CSR) program for capacity and capability building. We plan to establish a

much bigger training center from our existing one at Gurgaon and rope in the Masters level students of biotechnology into the program. The idea is to make the future researchers aware about the technology.

Besides the flow cytometry coupled with reagents, we are also growing with our business unit, Pharmingen. The company has introduced more than 5,000 products addressing the needs of a broad spectrum of biomedical researchers. Actually, it is a continuous evolving program depending on the needs of the scientists. BD has also targeted the unique segment of plastic ware for in vitro fertilization. We have also tied up with National AIDS Control Organization (NACO) for the monitoring of AIDS.

Q What is your take on the competition?

The core research market is getting stagnant. At the same time, the education market is quite big if the universities also start doing research. Since we cater to a very specific market, we enjoy complete monopoly over the segment of cell analysis and flow cytometry. During this business since last few years, we have established three Centres for Excellence (CoEs) at NCBS, Bangalore, Kolkatta University and CDRI Lucknow. Thats what makes us different from the others in the supplier space in which companies are generally considered as opportunistic and tender bidders.

Q What are your views on the growth of the biotech industry?

The Indian biotechnology industry missed the bus for targeted growth as a lot of work in the form of pharma R&D was lost to China. The hopes pinned on the new molecules have also not worked. The last few years have been prone to recession and it has also affected the growth of the industry. Since the aspirations of the biotech industry have not been fulfilled, I think that government has to put more efforts to boost the industry.

The schemes such as BIPP and SBIRI by the Department of Biotechnology need to be utilized by more companies for the effective progress of the sector. Besides that, India is good at the generics and biosimilar areas. The biogeneric space has lots of good opportunities and it is said that around $80 million worth drugs are set to go off patent by 2020. Going by that the industry definitely needs a new innovative strategy to drive growth.

Q What is the future outlook of your company?

We certainly want to evolve. We will be targeting the huge biotechnology education research market and also focus on expanding our reach in training. The personalized flow cytometry and higher education market offer a huge opportunity for growth. We are trying to cater to this space with technology, affordability and easy to use products. I feel that India and China together can be huge markets for this segment.

Besides the three existing CoEs, we are also looking forward to establish seven new CoEs in the next five years. I feel that there is still a wide market for analysis and diagnostics. Therefore, we would also be trying to tapthis vacant space.

Rahul Koul in New Delhi