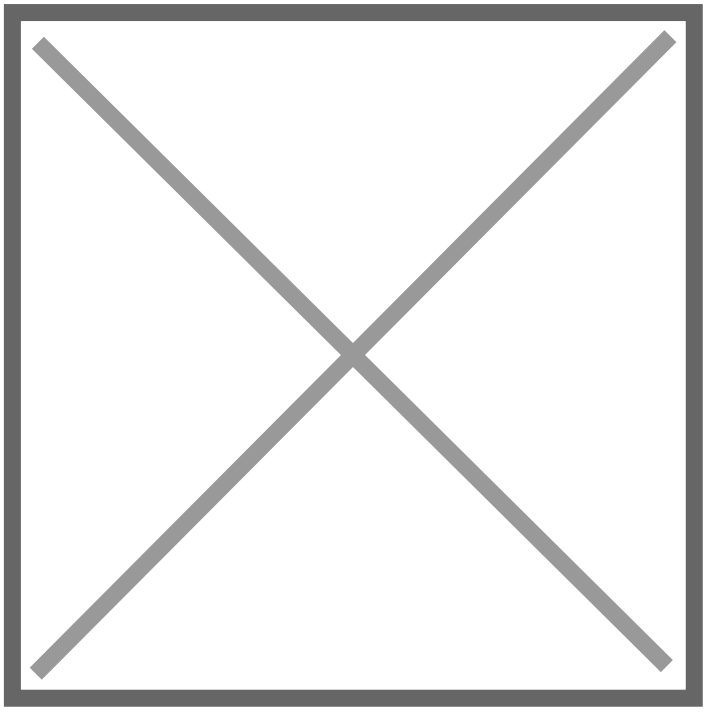
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"We have to hard sell Indian biotech to UK" - Nitin Deshmukh, director, ABLE

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What was the objective and outcome of your visit to UK?

The primary objective was to get the first hand knowledge of the biotechnology policy initiative of the United Kingdom, the fiscal and other incentives, regulatory framework, the intellectual property protection framework, public private partnership and exploring opportunities for linking ABLE members with UK bioclusters especially Cambridge, and Oxford

However, during the course of my initial meetings, I was taken aback at the perception of the UK biotech community on the aspect of intellectual property rights (IPR) protection in India.

My visit therefore ended up trying to change the perception on India amongst the UK biotechnology community and on selling India using all the information I had on the potential of Indian economy and various accomplishments of the Indian pharmaceutical, biotech and the technology sectors.

At the end, I must say I was pleased; that the companies, the intermediaries with whom I met all through have got more interested in India and evinced interest in initiating increased interactions with the Indian biotech sector, many of them keen to visit India during Bangalore Bio 2005 to have a closer look and feel of the biotech sector and explore potential collaboration opportunities.

How you find the mood of the biotechnology industry players/associations in UK about India and the biotechnology industry in particular?

As I said earlier, India certainly did not figure high in terms of preference for trade and collaboration for the biotech sector in the UK. There are certain preconceived notions about India's track record on IPR protection, which are clearly out of place in today's context with India complying with WTO on IPR and taking adequate steps for implementation of the same. There is also lack of quality information with the UK biotech sector about the Indian biotech sector/companies and the kind of high quality business/collaboration research that most of these biotech companies are doing with companies in the US, France, Germany, Australia, New Zealand etc. which could probably be the reason for ignorance.

It is very clear to me that both of us have to work harder to clear these misconceptions quickly and I hope that my visit has contributed to one step forward in this regard. While I am aware of the initiatives and the work of the British Trade Office in Bangalore in this regard, ABLE along with the Department of Biotechnology, Department of Science & Technology and The Indian High Commission in UK will need to do a lot more to change this mood.

What do you see on the next steps in improving the situation on exchange of quality information between respective biotech sectors?

Clearly organizations like ABLE, BIA, the British Trade Offices, The Indian High Commission in UK will have to take a lead role in facilitating this information as well as interaction between the biotech sectors of India and UK. Players like ISIS, ERBI,

Oxfordshire Bioscience Network, and London Technology Network etc. can be the platforms for such an exchange and we should work very closely with them to achieve our objectives.

Of the many meetings you had with different companies in UK which companies interested you?

I was impressed with the work done at Zenosis, which has developed a software product for information and training on regulatory issues for pharma and biotechnology sector in the US and UK and countries in Europe. It provides a comprehensive regulatory e- learning and knowledge building system that is uptodate and accessible online. I feel that the Indian pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies can benefit a lot from this product. Potentially we should explore Zenosis working with DCGI, DBT for developing a similar product for the India regulatory system.

On the drug discovery side, ASTEX Technology doing some good work in the oncology space using a proprietary fragment based discovery platform/engine. Similarly in the drug delivery systems space, work done by PowderMed in immunotherapeutics using a proprietary DNA particle mediated epidermal delivery (PMEDÃ¢â??Â¢) technology was very interesting.

What would be your 'take away' from this visit?

Yes there was a lot to learn from some of the meetings that I had with say Dr Colin Wyatt at Imperial College, London, Jeanette Walker at ERBI, Dr Tim Cook and David Baghurst at ISIS and Ian Young and David Masino at Department of Trade & Industry.

The Imperial College model of Business Development for Public Private is very interesting and can be a role model for similar research institutions such as AIIMS, GS Medical College etc. in India. Similarly ISIS is another good example of managing technology transfer from institutions to the private sector and seeding entrepreneurship at research institutions. Institutions like IISc, NCBS, CCMB can be good candidates to experiment with this model. ERBI too is doing good work on incubating companies and this could be a good model for biotech parks coming up in Bangalore, Hyderabad etc.

On the biotech Policy side work done by Department of Trade & Industry (DTI) on the Business Innovation & Growth Team, Business Futures Forum, Biosciences Leadership Council and Biotech Clusters can be excellent inputs for us in our Biotech Policy and other initiatives of the Department of Biotechnology.

Narayan Kulkarni