

US-India partnerships grow even during the global economic slowdown

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US-India BioPharma and Healthcare Summit, an annual summit organized by the USA-India Chamber of Commerce which brings together all stakeholders of the sector to facilitate trade and investments in US-India corridor, had attracted over 300 senior biotech, pharmaceuticals, medical devices and academic leaders this year.

Over 75 percent of discovery heads who participated in the annual Biopharma and Healthcare Summit felt the environment for drug discovery research collaboration between US and India has increased in the last 12 months.

In his opening remarks, Karun Rishi, president of the USA-India Chamber of Commerce applauded the efforts of the Government of India to make the country an innovation hub by 2020 and termed it as a bold initiative. Rishi also added that it will be feasible and realistic only when all the stakeholders are engaged and work together to fulfill this goal. Decision making and the implementation process have to be at a faster pace. He also stressed the need for greater industry-academic partnerships to foster innovation. There is an urgent need for partnerships between the US biopharma industry and Indian academia and between Indian industry and US academic institutions.

"We have created an ecosystem to bring together all stakeholders: industry, investors, academia and policy makers. This has become the only biopharma and healthcare summit in the world that attracts the largest number of senior stakeholders from the US and India at one location every year. Participants' mood was very upbeat," observed Rishi.

Panel discussions conducted at the summit covered areas like drug discovery, clinical research, funding innovation, merger and acquisition trends, and industry-academic partnerships. Discovery and clinical research heads of major biopharma companies participated in the summit. The summit saw representation from major companies like Amgen, Bristol Myers & Squibb, Eli Lilly & Company, Pfizer, Merck & Co, Biogen Idec, Genzyme, Johnson & Johnson, AstraZeneca, Schering Plough, Novartis, Reliance Life Sciences, Jubilant, Aurigene, Orchid, Suven, GVK, Sanofi Aventis. Other participants include academic leaders from 20 medical and public health schools and over 30 life sciences focused venture capitalists and private equity firms.

Dr Martin Mackay, president, global R&D, Pfizer, in his Keynote address observed:

- There is a great willingness to collaborate in India.
- Indian companies have great ability to adapt to western needs.
- There is a huge medical need in India, especially for infectious diseases.

Dr Mackay noted, "This is the golden age for drug discovery. The availability of tools, technologies, manpower and global access to develop products that are needed to treat health not just in the US but on a global scale are enhancing drug discovery."

Many biopharma companies spend their R&D investment in brick and mortar. Partnership model helps in avoiding duplicating this expense and helps to focus investment on pure R&D. Pfizer is working with partners in Asia on specific programs specific to Asia and world."

According to Dr Mackay, "The key challenge in drug discovery is to make medicines available globally and at affordable prices. The task for the R&D head is develop medicines that the patients can use. So the model has to change."

Dr William Chin, vice president, discovery research and clinical investigation, Eli Lilly, felt the pharma industry is under siege with flood of patent expiries, higher safety hurdles and pricing pressure. According to Dr Chin, there is too much clinical data available in the world, but the challenge lies in converting that data into knowledge for drug discovery. India with its IT strengths can play a vital role.

Dr John Thompson of Vertex Pharmaceuticals felt the need for open source-based research. Dr Thompson urged for balance between opportunity and purpose for neglected diseases like tuberculosis where one-third of the world is infected with it. Purpose from Indian point is important and the purpose-driven research leads to opportunity. Government support is needed for tackling neglected diseases in India.

Dr Joe Smith, vice president at Johnson & Johnson said, "India can be a major center for innovation globally. Johnson & Johnson doesn't view India as an emerging market. Dr Smith felt the infectious innovation can come from India. J&J is looking at ways to engage India. The company has spent \$8 billion on R&D globally and is working at creating academic partnerships in India."

Investors who participated at the summit observed that pharma has been the biggest creator of wealth whereas biotechnology has been a biggest loser for investors. There is an opportunity to tap the corporate venture funds of large pharma companies.

KV Subramaniam, CEO of Reliance Life Sciences felt that corporate funding will be available along with other capital sources but corporate investor will be more prudent in investing their funds. "Investments in innovative Indian companies are considered risky. To spur investments in emerging companies, there is a need for local venture capital firms syndicating their investments. There is an opportunity for private equity and VC investors to partner with the government to invest in healthcare infrastructure and innovation, especially in the current resource constrained global economy," said Subramaniam.

Nobel Laureate Prof. Sidney Altman, Dr Barry Bloom of Harvard School of Public Health and Dr Michael Rosenblatt, dean, Tufts Medical School, stressed on the need for greater investments in education and public health in India. About 80 percent of ideas used in biotech and physical sciences came from academia and were later picked up by the industry. To support the industry, India has to increase the quantity and quality of human resources. Challenges are enormous but India has the capability and potential to deliver.

Representing Department of Pharmaceuticals, Paresh Johri, Deputy Secretary reiterated Government of India's plan to promote innovation and R&D in pharmaceuticals. Making India a pharma innovation hub by 2020 can create five lakh additional jobs. Department of Pharmaceuticals has submitted a proposal to the PMO to create a fund to invest \$1-\$2 billion every year till 2020 to fund pharma innovation.