

BioPharma hires scientists

12 May 2004 | News

image not found or type unknown



Today more and more pharma companies are looking at biotech-based pharma products. Restructuring is the buzzword. In the recent times, several companies have announced to hire professionals in a big way. For example, Nicholas Piramal India Ltd, a leading pharmaceutical healthcare company, is expanding its operations and recruiting about 100 scientists. Torrent Pharma, an Ahmedabad-based pharma major is recruiting 100 scientists taking its total strength within the company from 190 to 290. Zydus Cadila, another Ahmedabad-based healthcare solutions company with a strong base of 200 scientists, is adding another 100 scientists to its team. Alembic Ltd, a Baroda-based pharma company, has planned to increase the number of scientists on its rolls from 100 to 250 Cadila plans to increase its strength from 150 to 200.

Employer Expectations

The trend is in favor of increased activity in bio-pharma. The marked change in human resource development initiatives is in view of the forthcoming patents regime. Pharma companies have identified R&D as one of the key growth engines. Besides research and manufacturing processes, developing new drug delivery systems and new chemical entities focus has created a demand for qualified trained professionals in related fields. Even several MNCs are looking to set shop to gain the cost, time, and the talents that power has advantage as R&D in their home countries are very high.

Postgraduate, doctorate, post doctorate degrees with specialization in molecular biology, biotechnology, Microbiology, biochemistry, biotechnology, and drug engineering, etc. "The potential for Indian BioPharma segment is huge. With the implementation of patents regime in 2005, Indian companies would not be able to do backward engineering of the drugs, so they are focusing on in-house R&D. The growth prospects are bright with many contract research organizations coming up and a large number of foreign pharma companies setting their R&D divisions here." Serum Institute is one of the largest exporter of vaccines and immunobiologicals of the country with its products being exported to about 38 countries across the globe.

Marketing
MBA, graduate/postgraduate degree with relevant experience in sales and marketing

"The sector calls for professionals from various fields as biopharma is the cocktail of so many faculties"microbiology, biochemistry, molecular biology, immunology, chemistry, biotechnology and more. It requires candidates with diverse qualifications"microbiologists for the manufacturing process, biochemists for the down stream processing, immunologists for animal trials, biotech engineers for bulk manufacturing processes or process standardizing, etc." he added.

Selection Process

Short-listing and then interviews
Traditional pharmacology is increasingly being considered as the downstream processing of biotech-based pharma. With this change in focus, the requirements of pharma companies at the entry level are also changing. Besides, regular pharma graduates cannot get into the industry is looking towards MSc and PhD candidates possessing specialized knowledge. The field requires people trained in new technologies with specialized skills, like immunoblotting, protein/genome analysis, western blotting etc. And in today's scenario candidates possessing these skills are rare. The responsibility and specialization of the individual will depend on the process, which he/she is handling"fermentation technology, downstream processing, proteomics, genomics, etc.

Knowledge and training in new technologies
"We are looking at people with a good background in biotechnology/biochemistry/ microbiology. Some basic technical skill is a must. At the same time they should have good understanding and reasoning capabilities, in addition to good communication skills and the ability to understand scientific literature," said Dr Shama Bhat, chairman and managing director, Bhat Biotech, a nine year old bangalore-based biotech company specializing in design development, manufacture and marketing of diagnostic test devices for various types of tests like hepatitis, pregnancy, HIV.

Two to three years of hands on experience
R&D, manufacturing/production and sales and marketing are the job categories in the Biopharma field. The importance of R&D is obvious and proper manufacturing is equally important so as to conform to the international standards of cGMP. Also since most of the products are targeted at the global market they should conform to the export specifications. According to Dr Ravetkar ideally the distribution of manpower in companies developing new biotech-based cures should be equal in both research and manufacturing. "The main thrust of most companies is towards these two, while marketing and sales form the smaller divisions. This is because at present this field being new, products being less, there is little competition. The main challenge is R&D and manufacturing the product rather than marketing the product," he said.

Training

Specialized in-house training programs for employees

trend

For recruiting candidates at the entry level, most companies advertise through leading national dailies or through the careers/jobs section in their websites. After the resumes are received candidates are shortlisted and called for interviews or sometimes written tests followed by an interview. Some companies arrange to walk the interviews as go for campus recruitment also. "We also go for campus recruitment in Pune University, Hyderabad University and Bombay University. In the interview we mainly consider the attitude of the student. There are three important points that we keep in mind while selecting candidates: their basic qualification, any additional courses they have done, which adds value like bioinformatics or courses in bioinstrumentation. And good project work," elaborated Dr Ravekar.

A common advice by pharma majors to aspiring candidates is to hone their skills. As, ironically on one side, the sector has a requirement of a large number of people and on the other hand there is an acute dearth of adequately trained students. Most of them do have a strong theoretical background but do not possess enough practical skills. Students need to gain hands on experience in the new upcoming branches of science. It is not that companies are not willing to train but the cost of training in terms of time is high. On an average investing in human capital, that is, training a fresh person requires about a year, which also many a times goes waste when they go for greener pastures. Thus a minimum work experience of two to three years is gaining priority and provides a crucial selection edge.

The salaries of researchers in pharma companies are appropriate, merit based and have begun to reflect the growing demand for skilled people. The growth potential for employees is good, as it is a nascent industry. Generally employees who perform well are sent for technology development training programs both in the country and abroad.

As developing new biotech-based solutions has become the main focus area for the pharma companies, the demand for the scientists is expected to continue to grow.

The Indian biopharma industry is the single largest contributor to the biotech industry. The total sales of biopharma products during 2002-03 was Rs 1,275 crore. This accounts for about 70 percent of the market share of the Rs 1830 crore industry.

- Out of the total size of Rs 1,275 crore biopharma segment, diagnostics, vaccines, and recombinant therapeutic proteins are the most promising sectors.
- The vaccines market in 2002-03 accounted for 57 percent of the total biopharma segment, with total sales of Rs 725 crore.
- Therapeutics is the second largest contributor to the sector with total sales of Rs 407 crore.