

Biocon's anti-cancer drug gains momentum

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Biocon launched its anti-cancer drug on September 17, 2006. Bollywood star, Shah Rukh Khan, unveiled its drug, Biomab-EGFR. On January 19, 2007, Biocon announced that it has granted an exclusive license to Ferozsons Laboratories Ltd for marketing BIOMAb EGFR in Pakistan.

This development clearly marked Biocon's entry into proprietary immunotherapeutics as it joined the exclusive league of MAb developers worldwide.

Biotech drugs such as Biomab-EGFR have shown better life-extension and even curing chances compared to chemo drugs. The drug is based on a therapeutic antibody and is the first of the eight MAb products being jointly developed by Biocon and its Cuban research partner, CIMAB. The drug is produced at their 51:49 facility, Biocon Biopharmaceuticals in Bangalore.

The antibody is rigged to target cancer of head and neck in which the sub-continent has 30 percent of the global incidence due to rampant smoking and tobacco chewing. Biocon would take up trials soon for other cancers such as lung, colorectal, breast among others.

Biocon made its largest ever investment of over Rs 200 crore in this drug and has set up a new Oncotherapeutics division to handle its upcoming products.

Biocon chief, Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw.

The debut made by BIOMAb EGFR in the Indian market since mid-September, 2006, has clearly evinced a strong licensing interest for the proprietary cancer drug in the region. "Biocon's decision to select Ferozsons Laboratories Ltd as its exclusive licensee in Pakistan was based on the leadership position that the company enjoys in Oncology. IMS data ranks Ferozsons as the leading national oncology company in Pakistan," said Dr Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, Chairman & Managing Director, Biocon Ltd. "Biocon is pleased to partner with Ferozsons for BIOMAb EGFR for the Pakistan market and heralds our efforts in extending the benefit of this 'best in class cancer drug' in the SAARC region. We believe that together we will strive to bring new treatment paradigms in cancer care in both Pakistan and India in an affordable way," added Shaw.

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The Pakistan oncology market is valued at approximately \$70 million. Monoclonal antibodies represent the fastest growing category of therapeutics with a CAGR of 30 percent.

BIOMAb EGFR is indicated for head and neck cancer and is being studied in global clinical trials for colorectal, lung cancer, glioma and pancreatic cancers. There are Over 25,000 new cases of head and neck cancer reported per year in Pakistan, according to Globocan, which mirrors the incidence of this segment in India.

Commenting on the licensing agreement, Osman Khalid Waheed, president, Ferozsons Laboratories Ltd, said, "We view this

agreement with Biocon as an important milestone towards achieving our vision of becoming a complete provider in the field of cancer treatment. Monoclonal antibodies are emerging as the most important new class of drugs in cancer therapy. With this alliance, we are confident that we will make a substantial contribution to the treatment of head and neck and other cancers in Pakistan by providing cutting-edge, targeted therapy at an affordable treatment cost for the patients of Pakistan."

According to Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw though biotech cancer drugs are available in India, they are beyond the reach of the masses. Biomab-EGFR is priced almost 40 percent cheaper compared to other MAb-based MNC drugs.

While the regulatory processes are on to take the first Indian biotech cancer drug to the South Asian markets, Biocon plans to strike partnerships to foray into the US and Europe, Mazumdar-Shaw added. It will shortly commence label expansion trials for Non Small Cell Lung Cancer and Glioma.

Ch. Srinivas Rao