

BIB 2015: Stem Cells, Bio Medical Innovation, Rare Disease & Orphan Drug Vaccine Research take centerstage

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The second day of the 15th edition of Bangalore India BIO was dotted with several thought provoking session addressed by key influencers from the industry. The day was dedicated to deliberations on research, diagnostics & collaborations that would create new pathways. There were a few session on Agribiotech that explored the nuances of bioenergy and value addition in agriculture.

The Agribiotech Inaugural Session opened with a keynote addressal by Mr Jagadish Patankar stressing on the fact that Biotech has a much larger role to play than just healing the world. Dr KK Narayanan inaugurated the maiden session of the day by giving an overview of what the day has to offer. Dr M Mahadevappa, director (Rural Development), JSSMVP, then went to elaborate on the importance of innovative technology in agriculture and how it can provide tangible solutions to the problems being faced today. Mr Srivatsa Krishna, secretary to Government, Department of IT, BT and S&T and DPAR (e-Governance) Government of Karnataka also shared his vision of taking Bangalore India BIO to a global level next year. Bio Medical Innovations and Diagnostics was attended by organizations like, InnAccel Acceleration Services, Johnson & Johnson Innovation Center, HTIC IIT Madras, Medtronic. The panel shared the best practices and highlighted how the innovation that they have adopted has helped the healthcare sector in India.

The Commercialization of Stem Cells: Promises & Public Concerns session was one of the key highlights of the second day. Sharing an insight into the evolution of stem cell therapy, Mr Mohan C Vemuri spoke of how the sector has seen major development over the last 14 years. He spoke of how stem cell therapy can help address cardiovascular, orthopedic & inflammatory diseases. The therapy can also be helpful for cancer treatment, allergen response, etc. He ended his addressal on a hopeful note stating that if we advance at this rate, treatment for the same can be made available to general public within the next 20 years. Dr Christian Van Den Bos, spoke about the aspect of commercialization of stem cell therapy and how regulatory frame work can aid the research by tweaking the guidelines a bit.

Dr Sanjay Desai, surgeon and professor, MS Ramaiah Medical College and Hospital spoke how stem cell therapy can emerge as the standard for medical care in the future given its non-invasive nature.

Ms Geeta Jotwani from the Indian Council of Medical Research expressed concern regarding the rise of stem cell therapy institution in India whereas none of the Indian stem cell based products has crossed the realm of clinical trials. She went on to elaborate the role that Government policies play in ensuring that the treatments reach the patients as early as possible, while ensuring their efficacy.

The Rare Disease and Orphan Drugs Development, Through Establishing The Orphan Drugs Act, session saw participation from a highly balanced panel consisting of doctors, NGOs and corporate sector.

Mr Sandeep Sahney, from Genzyme, spoke of how there are 7000 rare diseases in the world and though they are rare, these diseases are chronic, debilitating and can cause death. 80 percent of rare diseases also have a genetic component which makes it more threatening.

There are several threats that rare diseases face, few of them are:

- There is no prioritization in terms of research, since the diseases affect a very few number of people
- There is extremely low awareness about the disease amongst the medical fraternity and doctors
- The time gap between first appearance of the symptoms and diagnosis can be as long as 16 years, even in developing countries
- The pricing of the treatment is high considering the treatment has to be designed and administered to very few patients

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The speaker also stressed on the importance of society and Government coming forward to take the responsibility for treatment in such cases.

Dr Meenakshi Bhat, Clinical Genetic expert spoke about the importance of knowledge and awareness regarding rare diseases being key to finding a cure. She pointed out that about 30,000 children die before their first birthday, every month, in Karnataka from rare diseases, which makes the research & treatment a huge priority. She also urged the Government and private players to initiate research and aid treatment so that same can be made available to more patients in need.

One of the last sessions for the day, US-India Vaccine Research & Collaboration Creating New Pathways saw Emory Vaccine Center, Atlanta & ICGB, India come together to discuss the nuances of vaccination and preventive measures for common infectious diseases. The discussion provided an overview of the current situation followed by the measures that can be adopted to eliminate these disorders.

Second day at the conference saw a conglomeration of best brains in the industry in both India and abroad. The sessions focused on sharing thoughts, insights, best practices and case studies from across the world. The day ended on a rather high note building just the right kind of ambience for the final day of the conference.