

Strand, MRIGlobal collaborate on infectious disease diagnostics

30 March 2015 | News | By BioSpectrum Bureau

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Bangalore-based Strand Life Sciences entered into a partnership with US-based MRIGlobal, an independent non-profit organization performing contract research for government and industry.

The partnership is said to be an important step in the right direction towards enabling a focussed area of development and validation of tests for infectious disease diagnosis.

Strand and MRIGlobal will work towards successfully co-developing complex and high-end diagnostics.

At a global level, Strand and MRIGlobal will conduct joint R&D to integrate Strand SmartLab, which delivers NGS-based diagnostic lab and informatics solutions for oncology and other diseases, with MRIGlobal's Mobile Labs, which are deployed in resource-limited environments, to enable rapid disease diagnosis.

Mr Kay van der Horst, VP, research, development, engineering & testing operation, MRIGlobal, said, "In the last 10 years, there has been biosecurity threats, natural disasters, and the emergence of H1N1, SARS and Ebola. We emphasize on taking the knowledge and creating diagnostics solutions, and bringing knowledge in to public health response and preparedness along with innovating next-generation diagnostics solutions."

MRIGlobal was established in 1944 and operates in 25 countries. The organization was erected to support the government with R&D, and developing innovative technologies and solutions, particularly in chemical and biological sciences.

As part of the vision laid out in the partnership, Strand and MRIGlobal will bring together respective capabilities in biopharmaceutical clinical trials to co-develop companion diagnostics for drugs in cancer and other diseases.

Mr Kay continued, "We are also working with Strand in bringing point-of-care diagnostics. If we can diagnose diseases when

patients arrive at the point-of-care, then that will have better clinical outcomes."

Strand's will lead the genomic biomarker discovery, patient stratification strategy, companion diagnostic test design, bioinformatics data analysis/ interpretation aspects of the project, while MRIGlobal will perform independent validation of assays in their own lab in US, and help secure FDA approval for such co-developed diagnostic tests.

Dr Vijay Chandru, chairman & CEO, Strand Life Sciences, added that India faces serious challenges in the health sector.

"I wish there was a special category to the health sector, especially in terms of the technological side. Space, defense, and atomic energy have been declared as strategic sectors in the country, and they have certain privileges on how innovation and R&D is pursued in those sectors. We desperately need to bring in health sector in that domain," Dr Chandru suggested.

He also stressed that health crises need to be handled as 'mission critical', as we did for the Mars mission.

"There is great opportunity in the field of molecular biology and Next-Generation Sequencing (NGS). India has the capabilities of being a great contributor in these fields and stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the pace of the world," he noted.