

Pioneer in biologics - <I>Dr Gautam Daftary</I>

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With a rich product portfolio that includes many firsts in India as well as in the world, and with more than three innovative products in advanced stages of clinical development, Bharat Serums and Vaccines has carved out a prominent space for itself in the world of biologics and recombinants. Spearheading its research initiatives for more than two-and-a-half decades is Dr Gautam Daftary, managing director, Bharat Serums and Vaccines (BSV).

A medical doctor by training, Dr Daftary says that he did not originally intend to practice medicine. Instead, on completion of his studies, he underwent a number of trainings in leading institutes worldwide, to familiarize himself with techniques in protein chemistry for the development of blood products, that were the earliest offerings at BSV. Dr Daftary has since then completely focused on research and development (R&D) aspects, while his brother Bharat Daftary manages the business side of the family-owned company.

Under his able leadership, BSV has amassed a portfolio of more than 15 patents and several others that are yet to be granted. A focus on niche products, addressing unmet needs, has resulted in a number of challenging research projects being undertaken by Dr Daftary and his team. He said, "The challenges have driven us to break technological barriers so far. If they say we can't do it, it makes us want to do it even more. I liked the challenge that was presented to us for pursuing R&D in things other than blood products. We worked on it, and learnt as we went along to then successfully market Propofo, a lipid emulsion anaesthetic in 1997, a first in India where the technology was developed completely in house."

Dr Daftary heads the R&D that originates in three locations namely, India, Dusseldorf, (Germany) and San Jose, (USA). One of the innovate products to result from there has been, a recently launched Ulinastatin, a biosimilar for the treatment of sepsis. Lack of treatment options prompted BSV to carry out research in natural products at Dusseldorf to develop the product isolated from urine, a serine protease that suppresses polymorphonuclear elastase (PMNE).

Dr Daftary is also credited with starting what was arguably India's first contract research organization (CRO), way back in 1995. Over a glass of wine with his mentor Dr Ransberger, Dr Daftary agreed to conduct a small clinical trial for an anti

inflammatory compound. What began by chance then, has now grown to be one of the largest Indian CROs, with Dr Daftary as its chairman.

Another product in advanced stages is the Amphotericin B emulsion, again a first-of-its-kind in the world. The molecule has recently completed phase III clinical trials for the treatment of *kala azar*. As compared to the innovator molecule of Amphotericin B which has to be administered over four doses, BSV's formulation can be given in a single dose of 15 mg, because of the improved safety associated with it.

Moving ahead, Dr Daftary, has plans to develop recombinant versions of the existing products as well as newer ones to address the rising costs associated with natural materials.