

"We are niche players"

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Dhiren Wagle, country manager, Bio-Rad

Bio-Rad is a leading player in the diagnostics space with formidable presence in the life sciences and the clinical diagnostics business. While the life sciences sector caters to the academics like universities and government funded research institutes like IIT, CCMB and IISc, the clinical diagnostics group basically caters to blood banks, cell pathology labs and stand alone pathology labs that are there in the market. Dhiren Wagle, country manager, Bio-Rad, shares with BioSpectrum the current and future trends in the diagnostics market and how the company is geared to face it.

How has the diagnostics market changed in the last 10 years? How has Bio-Rad as a company adapted to the changing market?

With the economic liberalization, healthcare has become a priority. With India emerging as a major hub for clinical trials, the labs also have to prove that they are using international standards. So the diagnostics market has been growing steadily at the rate of 15-20 percent.

We have products starting from basic products that any lab would require like electrophoresis, ELISA systems. At the same time, we have also introduced new technologies from time to time. In the last 2-3 years, we have come up with products that have helped scientists in biomarker discovery. In biopharmaceuticals also we have products that will help the scientist from protein separation at the lab level to the production level.

What are the emerging new areas in life sciences and diagnostics?

Life sciences is going to be more of biopharmaceuticals since a lot of investment is going into it. At the same time clinical testing and contract research labs are also being set up. That means a lot of validation and accreditation requirements are also going to come up. New drug discovery is another area where we see the market growing in the next five years. In clinical diagnostics, the focus is now on quality. Though not regulated, the government is taking the right steps. It is putting together a plan for the labs to be accredited along with the National Accreditation Board (NABL). Quality will be the future as far as clinical diagnostics is concerned.

What distinguishes Bio Rad from its competitors?

We are niche players. We don't play in the run of the mill market like metallurgy analysis where most of the players exist. We have taken a lot of technology from our life sciences group to develop products for our clinical diagnostics division. In diabetes, we do HbA1c, a new way of managing diabetes. We have very little competition in these products. We have quality control products, which help labs manage their quality and also do statistical analysis. We are into genetic screening.

The only area where we compete is in infectious diseases testing wherein there are a lot of competitors, but even here we have positioned ourselves in the upper segment. We have introduced a state-of-the-art antigen antibody screening. Typically all the ELISA kits are used for HIV and HCV testing that used to test antibodies. What we are doing now is testing for both antigen and antibodies that reduce the window period. Last year we had a kit for dengue as well. In the life sciences, we have electrophoresis and gene transfer equipment, protein chromatography, and new drug discovery. There are competitors but they are in niche areas like expression proteomics and imaging for instance. They can't give as wide a range as we have.

What were some of the new products that Bio-Rad has introduced?

We introduced SELDI, which is a tool for biomarker discovery. We also introduced a product for protein interaction called Proteome. These were the two major tools introduced in the lab division. We have some kits coming in for protein extraction. We have kits coming in for protein sample preparation. We have some new standards for measuring the expression of the protein coming in.

Can you elaborate on your investments in infrastructure?

We have come up with a toll free tech support. All the customer needs to do is call us and we have the trained people to answer the questions on the phone itself. We are in a position to give them the solution on the same day. We have also reorganized our life sciences group in an application oriented way. For example, we have a team of product managers, which specializes in expression proteomics and another on chromatography so that they are experts in their field.

Shalini Gupta