

India lacks innovation culture, collaboration is the way forward: Industry

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The forum brought India's leading Life Sciences personalities and [game changing masterminds](#) to discuss and contemplate the future of Indian Life Sciences industry by the year 2020.

The star-studded panel discussion was garnered by eminent faces including Dr K K Narayanan, MD, Metahelix Life Sciences; Dr Rashmi Barbhaiya, CEO & MD, Advinus Therapeutics; Ms Bindhya Cariappa, COO & EVP Emerging Markets, ClinTec International; Dr Goutam Das, COO, Association of Biotechnology Led Enterprises (ABLE); Ms Rooma Bussi, Country Head - India, SDI; and Dr Sharon McKendry, Life Sciences & Chemical Sciences International Sector Head, SDI.

The panel discussion was moderated by N Suresh, group editor of BioSpectrum publication.

Dr Rashmi began the panel discussion by speaking about the significance of [innovation](#) and [collaboration](#) in the pharma industry.

"Having spent 30 years in the US, I came back for one reason -- the young Indian talents, since there is no past legacy for them. The manner in which young people go about finding [innovation](#) is amazing. Many companies from Europe, US and Japan have been in India for a long time. The cost of [innovation](#) in their respective countries is high and hence, they lookout for cheaper labor to solve issues," he opined.

The event witnessed 40+ attendance ranging from start-up CEOs to industry veterans, from deans of prestige institutes to research scientists and media fellows.

"The biggest [challenge](#) the industry is facing now is affordability and accessibility of medicines. The pharma innovation has no choice but to be a global network for innovation. Pharma companies need to look for places where innovations can be done best, faster and cheaper. No one company or country can do it all. To bring affordable and innovative medicines, we have to work together," Dr Rashmi emphasized.

Dr Binay Panda, Chief Officer & Head, Ganit Labs, said that innovation does not happen in large companies.

"Young people need to know how researchers and scientists in labs do innovation, and then take it to the real world. Innovation starts from the labs. We need more innovation success stories," he pointed.

Another panel member, Ms Bindhya Cariappa, expressed that India has great potential to perform well in clinical trials.

"We are living in challenging times. We have taken a lot of time to get where we are. The key is what difference are we going to make in people's lives and reach out to those who are involved in the healthcare delivery. When we started clinical trials, it was very new. Trials are the only opportunity for treatment and access of diseases. Regulatory reforms takes time. Today there is change in the technology and we need to push certain things. We have the potential to do extremely well in clinical trials. India promises efficiency through leveraging technology which ensures affordability and quality healthcare," she explained.

Dr Ajith Kamath, Head, External R&D Innovation, [Pfizer](#) India, pointed the significance of collaborations in a globalized world.

"Today, two-thirds of the world are touched by vaccines from India. When we look at the big picture, most of the molecules are made in India. Today, about 60-70% of the molecules in the pipeline are coming out of collaborations and not just from one particular company. Collaboration is the way forward. There are many opportunities to collaborate with Indian companies," he held.

Dr Raviraja Seetharam, Deputy Director, Business Development, Stempeutics Research stated, "Globally the biopharma industry recorded revenues of US \$180 billion, out of which US \$5 billion is from India. There is a lack of talent pool. We need to come together, collaborate and globalize products."

Dr Sharon shared insights on collaborative innovation and Scotland's offer to companies who want to set up their bases there.

"Currently I'm seeing a lot of entrepreneurship and customer focus in companies, as a lot of new technologies are coming up. In Scotland, we have more than 170 core medical devices companies, 140 pharma service organizations, and top 10 global CRO firms. Scotland is the land of innovation, all the way dating back from discovering penicillin to the cloning of the first animal, Dolly," she highlighted.

By 2020, the global population will reach 8 to 9 billion. This implies there is going to be increased demand for food, and the demands are going to stem from the developing world.

"We are a country of 1.3 billion people, and will touch 1.4 billion plus by 2025. It is estimated that India may need 450 million tons of food grains. Today, we produce about 250 million tons. By 2020, Bangalore, by population, will be twice the size of Scotland. India is second only to US in terms of arable land. 50% of the landmass in India is ploughed allowing no scope for further expansion. As we move forward, the land is going to diminish further. We have to increase the productivity and technology is going to be the key," stressed Dr K K Narayanan.

He believes that Indian agriculture is a prisoner of old and outdated technologies.

"We are doing well in terms of opportunities. But we are lagging behind in productivity. This is where the opportunity lies. Today we have a burden and a need. There are skills available to do the adaptive. Things can be tested, and yes, we do have challenges of regulatory and activism, but they can be overcome. In our country, I believe, you can only delay things but can't deny, because farmers in the country ultimately get it one way or the other," he voiced.

Dr Goutam emphasized how ABLE is involved with the government and other stakeholders to encourage more start-ups.

"The challenge is, we definitely want to encourage smaller start-ups in getting funding rather than depending solely on DBT or BIRAC grants. Private equities always look for quicker profits, maturity and exits. In drug discovery this is not the case. ABLE is talking to SEBI and the government to get into these areas where they can support smaller biotech start-ups by replicating the US model, where they can float shares and get into investments. The number of start-ups have definitely increased. Since 2009, we have launched more than 10 to 12 start-ups in different areas," held Dr Goutam.

Speaking about the Biodiversity Bill, he revealed, "One of the other issue is that the government should know how to go about biologics, biosimilars and biobetters. We are pushing the government to streamline the process and make things faster by 180 days. We are also trying to address the Biodiversity Bill. We are working with different government forces to find out what the government's position is with the Bill. The Bill is making it impossible to bring things in or to take them out of the

country."

Dr Rashmi also mentioned the approval pain that companies go through in the drug discovery process.

"When we discover a [new molecule](#), we have to make enough quantity of it to obtain approval, which takes months from the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI), to conduct clinical tests in animals and proceed with clinical trials. Every molecule is under patent, and the stakes are high while developing a molecule when we wait for the approval, which can go up to 18 months, when it takes less than a month in other countries," Dr Rashmi said.

Dr Sharon ended by speaking about various funding mechanisms available in Scotland.

"In Scotland, there are huge expert communities dealing with funding options. There are seed funding, co-investment funding and suitable funding partners. For companies, who want to come into Scotland, we have mechanisms to support them with grants and help them with their expenditure costs and setting up. There is a whole range of funding mechanisms available."

Dr Rashmi feels that India is lagging behind in innovation culture. "It (India) is more of generics oriented. It hasn't introduced many innovative medicines, and hence there are revenue discrepancies in the pharma industry. Due to the success of generics, established companies are averse to investing towards long-time innovation. The pharma innovation has about 10 to 15 years of waiting period," he remarked.