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US-India BioPharma and Healthcare Summit aims at big tie-ups



By Ajay Ghosh

Boston, MA: US-India BioPharma and Healthcare Summit 2010 organized by the USA-India Chamber of Commerce here on July 26, attracted over 350 senior biopharma executives, investors and academic leaders.

Inaugurating the summit, Karun Rishi, president of the USA-India Chamber of Commerce, said: "It is extraordinary to find so many senior global R&D leaders, academicians and venture capitalists in one day at one place. This ecosystem has helped us come out with innovative ideas to foster innovation and expand BioPharma R&D partnerships between the US and India."

Greater R&D collaboration was the theme of the summit. Industry leaders ranging from Pfizer's Martin Mackay to Merck's Merv Turner to Sanofi-Aventis' Marc Cluzel to Johnson & Johnson's Paul Stoffels and they agreed that building a trust among big

pharmaceutical companies, and with other stakeholders including academics and Indian service providers, was the key to harnessing wider networks, improving pipeline attrition and bringing effective drugs to market faster and cheaper.

Martin Mackay highlighted two partnerships he believed were a sign of things to come. In one, Pfizer and Glaxo-SmithKline teamed up on a wholly-owned subsidiary, ViiV Healthcare, focusing on HIV and AIDS, with each company contributing products and pipeline candidates. But Mac-kay also mentioned another benefit; one he thought dovetailed with the trust and partnership theme of the summit.

Pre-competitive collaborations were a major focus of discussion at the summit. Johnson & Johnson's Global Head of R&D-Pharma Paul Stoffels mentioned development of HIV biomarkers during the 1980s as another example where big pharma worked together to develop a framework that allowed for competition further up the R&D stream.

Stoffels suggested that industry leaders sit down and hammer out how to better share and collaborate in the pre-competitive space. But there was a limit to how far collaboration could go, Stoffels noted. "In the end, networks don't discover drugs, people do. And pharma companies need teams of dedicated scientists, who are likely to fail many times before getting it right," he said. "Nevertheless, pharma should work together to find targets or select likely responders, and save competition for later trials and R&D execution," suggested Rod MacKenzie, head of worldwide research at Pfizer PharmaTherapeutics.

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MacKenzie also suggested that Pfizer needed to transform its one-to-one partnerships by linking them together into a “collaboration of collaborations.” Once accomplished, Pfizer should then link its network of partnerships to networks created by other big pharmas like Lilly and Merck, he said.

Sanofi Aventis Executive VP and Global Head of R&D Marc Cluzel summarizing his partnership strategy in a PowerPoint slide show, said: “Share strategy, share networks, share resources and expertise, and share benefits.”

Like Pfizer, Sanofi has been active recently in Asia, signing a deal with India’s Glenmark for transient receptor potential vanilloid (TRPV3) antagonist molecules, with the Mumbai-based pharma getting \$20 million upfront and milestone payments that could bring in \$305 million more.

Sanofi also wanted to turn its “preferred partners” into “preferred networks.” Cluzel said Mervyn Turner, Chief Strategy Officer, Merck & Co., called business model innovation the true strength of India. That strength matched an acute need, Turner said, as big pharmaceutical firms understood that truly innovative drugs were innovative only if they reached the right patients. “We have to think very hard about a number of approaches to innovation in the business model, to surround our products with business and services, and to make sure that the molecules we do discover reach patients all around the world who can benefit from them,” Turner explained.

“India has a phenomenal track record in innovating in the business model,” Turner said, and cited as an example the Nano, Tata’s low-cost, four-passenger car, launched in India in 2009. “USA-India Chamber of Commerce has created network between local and global innovation communities — academia and industry, which necessarily do not communicate with each other said Dr. Barry Bloom of the Harvard School of Public Health.

These initiatives were bound to foster innovation in drug discovery. Seed innovation in Indian academia had been suboptimal said Kiran Majumdar, chairman of Biocon. To stay ahead of the innovation curve Biocon has actively collaborated with John Hopkins. Huge amount of learning could be shared between US and Indian academic institutions said Majumdar. She announced endowment scholarships for post-doctoral candidates at the Koch institute of MIT.

The discussions at the summit highlighted that greater opportunities existed for US-India BioPharma collaborations and the power of frequent high quality interactions between critical stakeholders that could catalyze and shape the nature and trajectory of the opportunity.

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