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Partnering with India

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Partnerships between US and Asian companies have become a prominent feature of pharmaceutical development and manufacturing. To foster relationships between US and Indian biopharmaceutical companies, the US-India BioPharma and Healthcare Summit was held in Cambridge, MA on June 23, 2011. The summit is an annual event, bringing together representatives from large US/European pharmaceutical companies, smaller US companies, academia, and patient interest groups with representatives of the Indian government and industry to discuss issues surrounding US-Indian partnering in biopharmaceutical development.

The topic this year was creating meaningful research and development (R&D) partnerships between US and Indian companies. The model for US-Indian partnerships has been straight fee-for-service, where an Indian company provides a service, such as late-stage chemistry or clinical trial support, but the design of the project is dictated by the western partner. Indian industry representatives would like to see the nature of the relationship between US and Indian companies progress toward something that looks more like a true partnership, where the Indian company is more involved in planning and designing studies, and can contribute innovation as well as execution. Endo Pharmaceuticals stepped forward as a model for such a relationship. Endo is a relatively new pharmaceutical company, in business for 13 years, that did not originally have an R&D program. Three years ago, they began one, and went to a completely outsourced arrangement. All of their R&D is done by an Indian partner, and they have been extremely satisfied with the arrangement. Dr. Martin Fitchet, of J&J was more reserved, indicating that of the number of collaborations he has participated in with groups in India, some have been successful and some less so, and that the key to success, in his experience, has been to carefully define the terms and expectations of the collaboration.

The news has been full of stories about large pharmaceutical companies scaling back R&D, because the return on investment has been so poor. Indian R&D, like manufacturing, offers the potential for savings, but it requires confidence on the part of US companies that Indian companies have the capacity for innovation and critical thinking that are required for a successful R&D program. Partnerships like Endo's are the exception rather than the rule right now but it's a step in the direction for Indian R&D.

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