

# Identifying India's 'magic beans'

This year's US-India BioPharma & Healthcare Summit identified areas where India can create a niche for itself, but called for more supportive action from policy makers to make this a reality, reports **Viveka Roychowdhury**

Mounting expectations from India as an emerging nation-pharma powerhouse were tempered with concerns on the policy front at this year's US-India BioPharma & Healthcare Summit in Cambridge, Massachusetts.



Welcome address by Karun Rishi, President, USA-India Chamber of Commerce



Keynote video address by Elias Zerhouni, President- Global R&D, Sanofi

As the organiser, Karun Rishi, President, USA-India Chamber of Commerce (USAIC) mentioned how "policy turmoil" on clinical trials has led to flat growth in the industry. He made the point that Indian patients have been ignored in this debate and in the long term they will be unable to fully gain from the benefits of novel innovative therapies of the future. "Comprehensive and transparent clinical trials policy is the need of the hour keeping patient benefit as top priority," he said.

As emcee, Dr William (Bill) Chin, Executive Dean for Research, Harvard Medical School said that the goal of the USAIC Summits is to discuss how to create affordable innovation. Giving a perspective, he opined that "while the focus may be India, the problems and solutions are actually applicable worldwide so we are looking at creating a global model."

In his video address, the keynote speaker, Dr Elias Zerhouni, President-Global Research & Development, Sanofi called for a symbiosis "on a grander scale" and said that India's role is to innovate but not just on cost. Stressing

that the industry had to decrease the failure rate of R&D, he said outlined certain areas where India could position itself as a "valuable partner."

## India's 'magic beans'

Some of those areas, dubbed India's "magic beans" came to light in a new report by The Boston Consulting Group (BCG) which was unveiled at the Summit. Commissioned by the USAIC, the report, titled *Biopharma R&D: Moving the Needle in Innovation*, made the point that although the Indian government has declared 2010 to 2020 the "Decade of Innovation," the country must encourage greater investment and activity in bioinformatics, applied research, and translational research to maximise opportunities for R&D in the life sciences.

The Summit focused on fostering collaborations and networking at various levels. Panel discussions on industry-academia partnerships, clinical research, R&D collaborations, funding and investment, and oncology helped spotlight the pain spots as well as the opportunity areas.

A panel discussion on industry-academia partnerships had panellists debating how such tie ups could drive the next wave of innovation. Dr

Barbara Bierer, Senior Vice President Research, Brigham and Women's Hospital felt that it was "critical" to have a team which will build the partnership. She averred that administrative issues needed to be sorted out in advance so that "the science can be smooth."

Dr Karen Antman, Dean and Povost, Boston University School of Medicine made that point that health science students needed to be aware of global health issues.

Speaking from the industry side, Dr Sridaran Natesan, Vice President, External Innovation (R&D), Sanofi made the point that the general perception is that industry-academia partnerships are not as productive they could be. He stressed that people are the most important factor in such tie ups, and such partnerships can only be successful only if there is interaction at three levels: from the senior-most leadership levels (CXOs and university deans who need to set the vision for such partnerships), to the next level (managers who need to manage the science) to the scientist level. Scientist level interaction needs to be promoted to a greater level. In this context, Dr Nirmal Ganguly, Chairman, JIPMER and Former Director, ICMR said, "We need to



**INDUSTRY-ACADEMIA PARTNERSHIP PANEL** (from left): Moderator Dr William Chin, Executive Dean for Research, Harvard Medical School; Dr Balkrish Nair, Executive Director, Translational Health Science Technology Institute; Dr Barbara Bierer, Senior Vice President Research, Brigham and Women's Hospital; Dr Karen Antman, Dean and Povost, Boston University School of Medicine; Prof. Phillip Sharp, Institute Professor, Koch Institute for Integrative Cancer Research, MIT; Dr Sridaran Natesan, Vice President, External Innovation (R&D), Sanofi



**CLINICAL RESEARCH PANEL** (from left): Moderator Dr Kimberly Wagner, Senior Partner & Managing Director, BCG; Dr John Orloff, Senior Vice President, Global Development and Chief Medical Officer, Novartis Pharmaceuticals; Dr Roger Glass, Director, Fogarty International Center, NIH; Dr. Nirmal Ganguly, President JIPMER and former Director General, ICMR; Dr Savita Dhillon, Medical Director, Medanta Duke Research Institute; Dr John Sundry, Associate Prof of Medicine, Duke Univ. School of Medicine

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◆ remove the mutual suspicion among IPR partners.”

Speakers in the session on clinical research were asked to give their suggestions to build a practical road map to achieve more from India. Dr Savita

First-In-Man studies.

Dr Renu Swarup, Managing Director, Biotechnology Industry Related Assistance Council (BIRAC) informed delegates of the investment schemes to be rolled out by the

gested that India could be a great place to re-purpose existing drug molecules as this is a niche area not as attractive for large MNCs. Finally, he said it was important to focus and prioritise investments, rather than investing in too



**DRUG R&D PANEL (from left):** Moderator Dr. Maya Said, Vice President- R&D Strategy and External Innovation, Sanofi; Dr. Rajiv Modi, Managing Director, Cadila Pharmaceuticals; Dr. John Leonard, Senior Vice President R&D, Abbott; Dr. Ivan Gergel, Executive Vice President R&D, Endo Pharma; Sri Mosur, CEO, GDD&D, Jubilant Life Sciences; Dr. Raja Sekhar Vundru, IAS, Joint Secretary, Department of Pharmaceuticals, Government of India



**ONCOLOGY RESEARCH PANEL (from left):** Moderator Dr. Raju Kucheralapati, Professor, Department of Genetics, Harvard Medical School; Dr. Nirmal Ganguly, President JIPMER and former Director General, ICMR; Dr. Elad Sharon, National Cancer Institute; Dr. Chris Takimoto, Vice President, Johnson & Johnson Pharma; Dr. Amba Nandakumar, Deputy Director General, ICMR



**INVESTMENT PANEL (from left):** Moderator Bart Janssens, Partner & Managing Director, BCG; Dr Renu Swarup, Managing Director, BIRAC, Government of India; Utkarsh Palnitkar, Executive Director, Centrum Capital; Dr RuiPing Dong, Senior Vice President, Head of Emerging Markets R&D, Merck & Co.; Dr. Robert King, Senior Partner, Global Healthcare Group, Goldman Sachs; KV Subramaniam, President & CEO, Reliance Life Sciences

Dhillon, Medical Director, Medanta Duke Research Institute, said that there was a need for initiatives where the public becomes a partner. Reflecting rising concerns on this front, Ganguly fielded various queries from the audience, giving clarity on the government's stance on various issues like

Department of Biotechnology in the near future, and also made the point that the Government of India did not want to “spread funding too thin.”

In his closing remarks, Chin presented some areas for future discussion. Referring to India's strengths as identified in the BCG report, he sug-

gested that India could be a great place to re-purpose existing drug molecules as this is a niche area not as attractive for large MNCs. Finally, he said it was important to focus and prioritise investments, rather than investing in too many areas. He concluded by congratulating the organisers on a fruitful Summit and hoped that the USAIC would continue to remain a good communication platform, between all stakeholders, to convert these talk points into solid action. ■

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