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US-India healthcare summit highlights collaborations

India Post News Service

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Industry academic partnership panel

NEW YORK: US-India BioPharma & Healthcare Summit 2010 organized by the USA-India Chamber of Commerce in Boston recently attracted over 350 senior Biopharma executives, investors and academic leaders. The annual summit has become the Biopharma event in

the world for senior R&D executives involved with drug discovery and development.

Inaugurating the summit, Karun Rishi, President of the USA-India Chamber of Commerce stated: "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. We are confident, business and research partnerships will continue to grow leading to the development of new drugs helping the mankind globally."

Annual R&D spend of key global pharma firms participating at the summit was more than \$30 billion.

Prominent global leaders of the pharmaceutical industry and over 14 Deans/Chancellors and Vice Chancellors of top medical and public health schools participated along with their outstanding senior research colleagues in the daylong summit. Industry-Academic partnerships will gain momentum due to senior level participation of academic leaders. Greater R&D collaboration was the theme of the day at the star-studded 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 agreed that building trust among big pharmaceutical companies, and with other stakeholders including academics and Indian service providers, is key to harnessing wider networks, improving pipeline attrition and bringing effective drugs to market faster and cheaper.

Innovation will unlock value

Martin Mackay highlighted two partnerships he believes are a sign of things to come. In one, Pfizer and GlaxoSmithKline have teamed up on a wholly owned subsidiary, Viiv Healthcare, focusing on HIV and AIDS, with each company contributing products and pipeline candidates. In another example, Mackay mentioned a pre-competitive collaboration among Pfizer, Lilly and Merck to launch the Asia Cancer Research Center, which aims to collect and share pharmacogenomic data on Asia cancers, focusing on biomarkers for lung and gastric cancers.

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

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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 is a limit to how far collaboration can 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. MacKenzie also suggested that Pfizer needs 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, MacKenzie said.

Creating communication networks

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 are bound to foster innovation in drug discovery. Seed innovation in Indian academia has been suboptimal, said Kiran Majumdar, Chairman, Biocon. To stay ahead of the innovation curve Biocon has actively collaborated with John Hopkins. Huge amount of learning can 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 and energy at this year's summit highlighted that greater opportunities exist for US-India BioPharma collaborations and the power of frequent high quality interactions between critical stakeholders that can catalyze and shape the nature and trajectory of the opportunity.



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