

The specialized Global CRO

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Mr Apurva Shah,
Group MD, Veeda Clinical Research

Having made a spree of global acquisitions in the past five years, Ahmedabad-based, Veeda Clinical Research will now look at tapping the US market

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When Mr Apurva Shah and Mr Binoy Gardi co-founded Veeda Clinical Research in 2005, they had a focused strategy in mind – to establish a global presence instead of being India-centric. In addition to this, Mr Shah and Mr Gardi decided to specialize only in phase I early clinical development. Since then the founders have stuck to their guns. In a span of five years, it has been a journey of quick acquisitions of phase I CRO units across the globe for Veeda Clinical Research.

The Global Call

With stupendous growth of 70 percent driven by the strategy, Veeda is known in industry circles as an 'acquisitive company'. Today, it has a direct presence in the US, Europe, India and Malaysia. Within a span of five years, Veeda made four CRO acquisitions in Europe, has set up pharmacology units in India and the UK (Plymouth) and a biometrics team in Brussels, Belgium.

In January 2007, it completed the acquisition of DICE, a Brussels-based CRO unit. Subsequently, it forged a deal in May

2007, with Shanghai-based Novamed. In the same month it completed its acquisition of a phase I unit at Gorlitz, Germany, thus adding to its existing European units in the UK and Belgium. The same year, it also announced plans for another four acquisitions in four months, in addition to investing another 100 crore in expansion of facilities and acquisitions. Recalls Mr Apurva Shah, group managing director, Veeda Clinical Research, "We made our first acquisition of a top end phase specialist unit in the UK in June 2005, making us the first Indian CRO to go out and make an acquisition. We wanted to be a specialized high quality CRO instead of a general "can do everything" kind of Indian CRO."

From a company which had five people on board, the present manpower strength has gone up to over 400 people across the globe. In terms of infrastructure set-up, the company has spread its wings far and wide. "We have 162 beds at Ahmedabad; six beds at a specialty hospital in Nadiad, India; 61 at Plymouth, UK and 40 beds at Malaysia. We have a staff of 30 people in the US for oncology studies and are about to purchase a Phase 1 unit at the US soon. We also have biometrics unit at Mumbai and Belgium," adds Mr Shah.

This apart, Veeda's subsidiary unit, Veeda Oncology has been maintaining a good track record. Established in 2008, Veeda Oncology provides phase I-IV studies in the field of oncology to pharma and biotech companies. In the same year, it announced that it had completed the acquisition of Biologie et Industrie (B&I), an oncology CRO founded in 1984, based in Paris, France. The division has operations in India, Eastern Europe, Western Europe and the US. In 2010, it was awarded new clinical research programs worth over \$8.4 million.

On the whole, the company has made consolidated investments of 100 crore till date.

The Game Plan Forward

The acquisition strategy has not been a cakewalk for the company. The challenges have been humungous in terms of finding the right partner who could be a strategic fit for Veeda. "To find the right organization and people, closely matching the value system of Veeda is very challenging. As this is a people-orientated business, distance plays a critical factor and a lot of time is required in each geographic location for integration."

Having consolidated its position in India, South East Asia and Europe, Veeda is now looking at the US market which it has not yet tapped. "We believe that the future of pharma lies in the East but the US economy will also bounce back soon, and thus a presence in the US is very much required. The advantage of being close to the client is to understand the business and the cultural needs of each region. China is a crucial market for the future and we plan to be there in 24 months," concludes Mr Shah.