

"Building a reliable supply chain through a local warehouse in India is a key strategy going forward"

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With more than 20 years of relevant commercial and general management experience in the pharmaceutical and healthcare industry, Ravikrishna Chebolu is now leading West Pharmaceutical Services' cross-functional India leadership team to drive further growth for the business and deliver strategic plans for India. In conversation with BioSpectrum, Ravikrishna Chebolu, General Manager, India-West Pharmaceutical Services, Inc. talks about the company's future plans



How is West Pharmaceutical Services driving innovation to provide injectable drug containment and delivery solutions?

Since its founding in 1923, West Pharmaceutical Services has had an enduring legacy of innovation in materials science, product development, and manufacturing of technologically advanced, high-quality, integrated containment and delivery systems for injectable medicines.

Understanding regulations and finding the appropriate packaging and delivery system for injectable drugs to ensure patient safety is a very vital part of pharmaceutical and biopharmaceutical development and manufacturing. West has established a strategic R&D framework to support its innovation efforts that include applied research, advanced engineering and technology scouting.

A key accomplishment we'd like to share is the recent collaboration with Corning. We agreed to invest to expand Corning's Valor Glass technology. By combining West Pharmaceutical Services' industry-leading NovaPure components, with FluroTec barrier film technology, and Corning's Valor Glass and Velocity Vials, the collaboration will enable new, advanced pharmaceutical packaging solutions. This collaboration will enhance our product portfolio, signifying our dedication to advancing next-generation technology and patient safety.

How is West Pharmaceutical Services expanding its presence in India?

West Pharmaceutical Services has been present in India since 1990 and today we are close to 800 team members in the country. We have a very strong team that collaborates with our customers in India with the technical support they need locally and a warehouse in Chennai where we started operations in 2021. The Sri City seals production facility supports our customers in the Asia Pacific region with a particular focus on India. Our Digital Technology Center (DTC) in Bengaluru supports West Pharmaceutical Services' efforts in product development, including embedded solutions such as artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, and smart devices along with digital manufacturing, E-Commerce, etc.

How do you see the opportunities in India for West Pharmaceutical Services evolving in the post-COVID-19 scenario and what are the current challenges in the market place?

Indian pharma companies continue to invest in expanding their R&D portfolio and commercial operations. We have recently witnessed announcements related to capacity expansions, acquisition of new pipelines and expansions from domestic and RoW to regulated markets. As investments in generic injectable pharma continue to increase in India, West Pharmaceutical Services is well prepared to meet market demand more efficiently and further establish the company's presence in this growing and dynamic market in the next five years. Understanding the pain points of generic pharma, we have launched a new packaging component, AccelTRA, for generic drug developers and manufacturers in India, intending to help them address the unique needs to be able to quickly respond to un-forecasted market demand while meeting increasing quality standards.

Indian biopharma especially the biosimilars segment continues to grow and West Pharmaceutical Services with our high standards in design and manufacture of components to support our biologics customers globally offers industry-leading solutions with proven credibility. West's NovaPure components work with complex large molecules and adhere to QbD principles in design and processing. We also have ReadyPack Systems to support R&D quantities for biologics customers.

One of the biggest challenges faced by pharma and biopharma companies and their drug delivery system partners is navigating the changes in global regulatory requirements. West Pharmaceutical Services has been a trusted partner for them in terms of getting the required technical support related to not just the primary packaging components they currently use, but also to help them in building their pipeline of new medications and delivery devices.

Another key challenge is managing supply chain challenges, which have been further complicated by the pandemic across the world. Organisations around the globe continue to face challenging situations around raw materials availability, labour shortages and transport logistics. To cater for the growing customer demand and address the supply chain challenges, as well as in response to unprecedented demand for our products and services, West Pharmaceutical Services has been and is still investing in expanding capacity within our global manufacturing network to drive resilience and flexibility both globally and regionally. Since the onset of COVID-19 in 2020, West Pharmaceutical Services has globally recruited more than 1,000 new team members and committed over \$400 million to build up worldwide capacity in key product lines to support both covid and non-COVID-19 related demand. In the Asia Pacific region, there will continue to be equipment upgrades and technology transfers to further address lead time and support regional needs including the Indian market. This year we invested in a major initiative to build a local warehouse in Chennai, supporting our customers by maintaining inventory of key components and reducing the overall lead times significantly.

These are all our efforts as part of an end-to-end supply chain strategy to better address the evolving needs of our customers and the complex market supply challenges for the long term.

What new strategies are in place/ being proposed under your leadership for the Indian market?

India's growth strategy is very much aligned with the West Pharmaceutical Services' market-Led strategy towards positioning us well for the future including expanding innovative, high-quality products aligned to ever-changing market needs, partnership with healthcare companies from concept to patient, and continuous advancement of our global network with increased capacity, quality and throughput.

Building a reliable supply chain for our customers through a local warehouse here in India is one of the major initiatives in our strategy going forward. We will not only stock the majority of the components that our customers regularly procure here in India but in the process also support them with importing procedures and local transportation. Coupled with our strategy to make Singapore our preferred supply plant, this "India supply chain optimisation programme" is aimed at providing the much-needed supply assurance for our customers and contributes to their on-time successful R&D development and commercial manufacture.

Providing the best-in-class technical support to our customers from the early stages of R&D to commercial manufacture is another key area that we will further strengthen to support our growth here in India.

We will strive towards the objective of being more flexible and offering our customers the "ease of doing business" to fuel our growth further. We are currently working on several digital initiatives toward this objective.

West Pharmaceutical Services and our team members view Corporate Responsibility (CR) as a means to make a positive impact in the communities where we work, and with the customers we serve. We make this impact by conducting our business in a socially, ethically and environmentally responsible manner that takes into account the activities necessary to sustain our business over the long term.

What employee-friendly initiatives would you like to propose for your staff, particularly for women?

At West Pharmaceutical Services, team member safety has always been a critical element of our strategy, and the onset and rise of the pandemic required elevated safety measures and a greater focus on the overall health and well-being of our team. Inherent to our core value of One West Team, West Pharmaceutical Services has a long-standing commitment to diversity and inclusion. With the thought of enriching workplace experiences and cultivating a sustainable business, we have Employee Business Resource Groups at West Pharmaceutical Services' connect team members with a diversity of thoughts and backgrounds. One of which worth mentioning is the WIN (Women Initiatives Network) group. Through mentoring, education and networking, the group supports and encourages women's professional success and leadership potential. Another such group is MOSAIC which is around diversity and inclusion. The group brings in people of diverse cultures, geography race, sex etc. together and works towards strengthening the core of One West culture.

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