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“The penetration of genetic testing still remains abysmally low in a country like India”

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The pandemic taught us important lessons, which goes beyond masks, sanitisers and lock down. It re-emphasised the need for molecular diagnostics with genomics playing a central role. With this view in mind, Agilent has recently opened a state-of-the-art diagnostics and genomics Centre of Excellence at Manesar with an investment of Rs 2.48 crore. The lab is housed within the ten acre Agilent campus and has been built over an area of 4500 sq ft.

During an interaction with BioSpectrum India, Dr Samir Vyas, Country General Manager, Agilent Technologies shares about the new centre and the growth of the genomics market in India.

What are the key diagnostic areas that Agilent will be exploring through this new centre?

As we continue our focus on fighting cancer, this lab will play a key role in training scientists and researchers on the latest technologies in cancer research and early cancer detection. Our diverse portfolio of products, including our state-of-the-art clinical interpretation software and our class-leading library prep chemistries, will support clinical researchers as they work to understand and advance genomics testing in India for cancer.

Will you be hiring new talent for the facility? What would be the skill set required?

The genomics lab will serve as a customer training and development centre. The scientists conducting customer training will be well versed in the latest genomics tools after spending a few years in the lab themselves unravelling complex biological processes.

Which key equipment/technologies are being installed at the centre? What are the core challenges being addressed through these new technologies?

The genomics lab is the first investment that Agilent has made in this space. The lab showcases Agilent's latest innovation and products for next generation sequencing (NGS). Agilent's NGS based precision oncology solutions help biopharma and clinical researchers accelerate cancer detection and diagnosis. Adding to this workflow, the Agilent Magnis NGS Prep System, a benchtop automated system with an on-board wizard, that allows assays to be set up in under five minutes, enabling molecular pathologists to profile samples for various genetic aberrations using a single, cost-effective, and efficient platform. The facility also houses Agilent's Microarray platform used for copy number analysis. Agilent arrays are extensively used in cytogenetic laboratories for prenatal and postnatal research. Over the next few years, we plan to invest further by adding another laboratory focused on Agilent's pathology solutions. Our customers would then have access and training in a broad range of cancer research and diagnostic tools, including fluorescence in situ hybridization (FISH), immunohistochemistry (IHC), cytogenetics, as well as other molecular pathology techniques and NGS-based solutions.

How do you foresee the growth of the genomics market in India?

Post COVID, the market for genomics is experiencing an upward trend which we expect to grow rapidly in the next couple of years.

What are the major plans in store at Agilent India in 2023?

Improving the human condition remains our mission. The penetration of genetic testing still remains abysmally low in a country like India with a population of 1.5 billion people. By opening this new Agilent genomics lab in India, we intend to increase awareness, in addition to training scientists on the latest innovations.

How much growth is expected in FY 22-23 for the India business?

India remains a very compelling market for Agilent. We are focused on it and firmly believe in the potential for continued high growth. We have therefore been making huge investments in India, not just in infrastructure but also in product registration and hiring exceptional employees. With these things in place, we expect to grow even more than the market growth rate.

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