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"Our GeneXpert systems for TB testing are present in 35 States and UTs"

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US-based molecular diagnostics company Cepheid has recently set up a production plant in Bengaluru where Xpert tuberculosis (TB) testing cartridges will be manufactured for the Indian market. Laurent Bellon, Senior VP, Global Operations reveals more in an interaction with BioSpectrum India about the future of the Indian market and how Cepheid can contribute more towards eradicating TB in the country



How big is the molecular diagnostic testing market for TB in India? How much is Cepheid contributing to this market in India and globally?

While there were 21.4 Lakh TB cases notified in India in 2021 (as per the WHO Annual TB Report 2022), the National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme (NTEP) is estimated to have conducted 3.5 million molecular TB tests in 2022. With India focussed on eradicating TB by 2025, there is a strong commitment from all quarters especially the governments, at both the Central and State level, to put in place strong structures to achieve the goal.

Cepheid has over 50,000+ instruments globally with over 100 Million TB tests conducted globally since launch. We provide molecular diagnostic testing for TB in each of the 30 high-burden TB countries (as defined by WHO). In India our GeneXpert systems are present in 35 States and Union Territories (UTs) and the system has helped diagnose 43 per cent of total notified TB patients in India in 2020.

How can Cepheid contribute towards eliminating TB in India by 2025?

TB testing is crucial to enable the control of TB incidence as early diagnosis helps in controlling the spread of the disease. Our GeneXpert system is a flexible testing platform that delivers accurate and fast results, thereby reducing the time taken between diagnosis and commencement of treatment. In addition, the system is easily deployed and simple to operate – creating improved accessibility in a country as large and diverse as India.

Cepheid is strongly aligned with the Government of India's goal of TB eradication by 2025 and the commencement of manufacturing in India was planned to help enable self-reliance in TB testing while strengthening the broader molecular diagnostics production capabilities in the country

Cepheid recently inaugurated its first company-owned production facility in India. Tell us more about the facility. How much has been invested to set up the facility?

We are delighted to formally inaugurate our first manufacturing facility in Asia and the first outside of the US and EU. The 77,000-square-foot facility in Bengaluru will manufacture the company's industry-leading Xpert tuberculosis testing cartridges for India and other countries. The facility was developed as part of our Make in India for the region initiative which ties in well with the Government of India's drive to enable an Atmanirbhar Bharat. We have invested significantly in the facility, as it is a key component of our global manufacturing network that we believe will serve some of the critical regions with the 30 high-burden TB countries.

What kind of equipment/ products will be manufactured at the new facility?

At the outset, we will be manufacturing Xpert tuberculosis testing cartridges and we will explore opportunities to ramp up production and diversify capabilities.

What kind of employment opportunities have been generated post the launch of the facility?

Currently, we have over 400 Cepheid associates in India with around 170 team members at the new facility. We are committed to building a diverse workforce and we currently have 48 per cent women team members within our operations in India.

How do you foresee the Indian market as a bio-manufacturing hub? What are the opportunities & challenges in store?

We believe that India is emerging as a strong market for the manufacture of medical devices. Our investments in the new facility highlight our belief and commitment to the market and this being our first manufacturing facility in Asia is a strong statement of our confidence in India. The growing market for diagnostics with a large population base and clear direction by governments at all levels in improving healthcare outcomes underlines a clear opportunity.

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