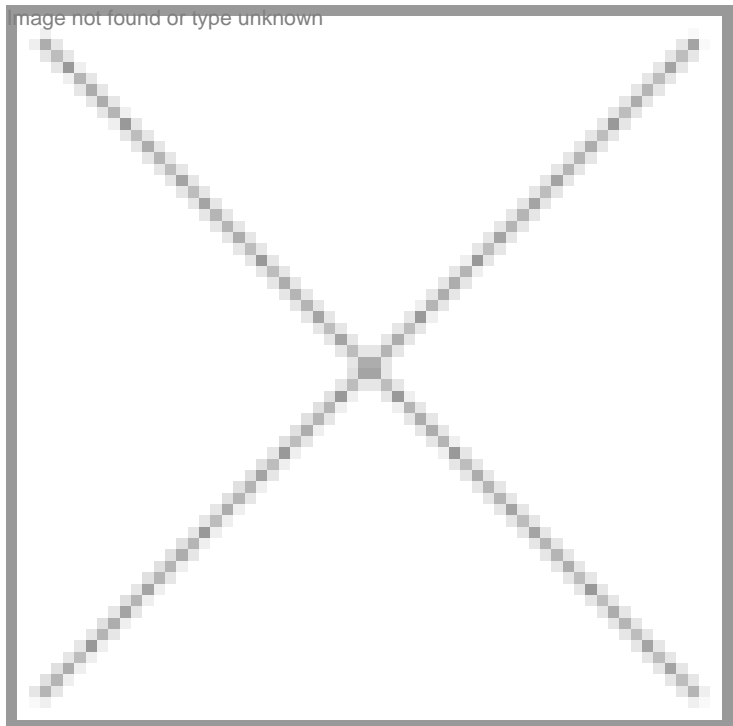


"Drug discovery is the next wave and the next transition for India is going into drug discovery"

08 February 2007 | News



"Drug discovery is the next wave and the next transition for India is going into drug discovery"

-Dr Rashmi Barbhaiya, CEO and managing director, Advinus Therapeutics.

What is the USP of Advinus Therapeutics?

This venture is essentially a drug development center, a first of its kind in India. And what I mean by that is this is the only center in India that has capabilities and bandwidth to provide support for developing new drug entities, from process chemistry to analytical chemistry formulation, development, drug metabolism, toxicology and clinical development. Not only do we have state-of-the-art laboratories, but also people who have R&D capabilities. There are a few outstanding facilities in India which cater to process chemistry and formulation. There are also some toxicology facilities as well. But to the best of my knowledge, there is no single place in India where everything is under one roof. And that's what we have created here at Advinus.

What are your expansion plans?

We have totally invested close to about Rs 150 crore and we are generating a lot of revenues. We hope that our revenues will be sufficient to build the future of the company. We are going to grow as the business expands and we definitely have plans for ambitious growth.

Why was Bangalore chosen?

Bangalore has some outstanding academic institutions from where we can tap our resources. It has an industry that boasts for biotechnology work as well. Last, but not the least, when the Tatas showed interest in supporting our project, they offered us to acquire this particular facility, which has a running toxicology facility and this was part of our plan as well. Had we gone anywhere else, it would have taken us at least two years to set up the infrastructure.

How different is this facility in Bangalore from the one in Pune?

In Pune we do only drug discovery and we do not provide any services. This (Bangalore) is by and large a service organization and in this place we do not do any drug discovery. We only provide support in developing drug candidates. It is more of regulatory work here as opposed to discovery work in Pune.

How do you see the future of drug discovery in India?

Drug discovery is the next wave. India has made tremendous success in genetic business and the next obvious transition for India is going into drug discovery and we are very proud to be one of the initial companies to do this. We have our own internal drug discovery program as well as we do have plans for collaborative drug discovery as well. One of the drug discovery collaboration is Merck & Co. and we are very proud that in such a short period of our existence, we have managed to forge an alliance with as prestigious and accomplished company such as Merck. We expect to have at least one or two similar relationships in the future. We will essentially collaborate with companies, which will add value to us. Whenever the next alliance occurs, it would be with a company that has the same kind of stature as Merck.

In addition, we also believe that we need to give something back to the society. Therefore in the second half of this year, we would be also looking into some of the neglected diseases as well such as malaria, tuberculosis and leishmaniasis, where we would be doing some drug discovery as well as development work. We know that it is not going to bring in a lot of revenues, but it is the right thing to do. So this is something that we want to give back to the society.

What are your views on the contract research market and the pharma development business in India?

The contract research market so far has been in the chemistry space and I personally believe that we are essentially opening up the new frontiers for developing new drugs on a contract basis term. This is a tremendous opportunity for global companies as well to develop drugs faster and in a cost-effective manner and create more opportunities. I strongly believe that we are opening up some new horizons that so far has not been leveraged in India.

My colleagues and I have essentially come to India with a mission. We really believe that we can bring a lot of value to India through our years of experience in the US. For example, we have over so many years of experience in this company which is unparalleled. That allows us to do things that many companies in India so far have not started yet. That differentiates us from the others.

Namratha Jagtap