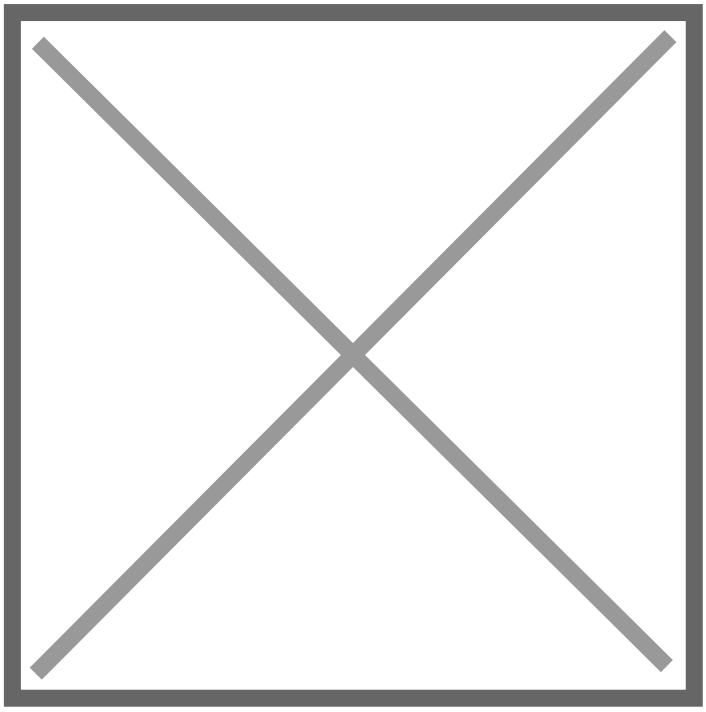


BioNews

02 June 2008 | News



HCG obtains $20 million funding from PremjiInvest

Bangalore-headquartered HealthCare Global Enterprises, a private sector oncology institution, has announced that PremjiInvest, a fund sponsored by Wipro chairman Azim Premji, has invested $ 20 million (approximately Rs 80 crore) in the company. Prakash Parthasarathy and Bobby Mustafa of PremjiInvest have been inducted into the Board of HCG.

The fresh funding would help HCG to enlarge its vision of backward integration in cancer management on a pan-India basis and realize its dream of making cancer treatment accessible to all segments of the society. The additional financial muscle would also enable the corporate hospital to adopt global innovations in the diagnosis, treatment and management of cancer, besides aggressively pursuing its "Hub and Spoke" model of cancer care centers nationally.

Dr Ajai Kumar, chairman and CEO, HCG, said, "Investment from PremjiInvest would enable us ramp up fast across various geographies besides enhancing our core research initiatives and bring cutting-edge technologies and treatment modalities. We value their operational expertise in creating world class businesses, best practices and technology and look forward to forge a strong relationship with them".

Prakash Parthasarathy, chief investment officer, PremjiInvest, said, "Healthcare in India is going through rapid transition and need for top quality specialized medical care is increasing. HCG already has strong credentials in oncology care, a highly accomplished medical team and a committed management under Dr Ajai's leadership. We are honored to be part of this passionate organization addressing a critical gap in the country's infrastructure".

HCG, a physician-led initiative, which manages a network of 10 cancer centers across India, is planning to expand to 15-20 centers in the next five years and would invest about Rs 8-10 crore for each center. It is also in the process of establishing three Centers of Excellence (CoEs) at a cost of Rs 40-50 crore for each center of excellence. These CoEs, which will have telephysics, high-end labs and reference labs facilities, are coming up in Bangalore, Delhi and Ahmedabad. The Bangalore CoE is expected to be ready by the year-end.

UL's management system registration business to merge with Germany's DQS

Underwriters Laboratories (UL), an independent, not-for-profit product safety certification organization, has announced that its management system solutions business will merge with DQS, a global registrar in independent third party management system certification services headquartered in Frankfurt am Main, Germany.

Under the agreement, the new entity will operate as a separate, stand-alone organization, with UL maintaining an ownership share. John Schmidt, UL's chief development officer, will sit on its supervisory board. Financial terms have not been disclosed.

"This is a synergistic joining of companies with complementary geographic strengths and a shared commitment to customer service and technical excellence," said Keith Williams, UL's president and CEO. "By combining forces, we will achieve a top five global market position in the management system certification industry, and we will have the capacity to serve as a leading provider of these services in every major geography."

This merger will meet the growing market demand to offer a full suite of services to customers who are expanding globally. It will also enable UL to provide a broader scope of management system registration services to better serve its valued customers. "Our businesses share a dedication to ensuring the sustainable success of management systems and processes," said Stefan Heinloth, managing director of DQS. "As organizations of all sizes and scope of industry face more and more challenges due to the speed of change within both domestic and international markets, the need for superior, secure management systems becomes paramount."

Top biopharma execs, and policy makers to participate in US-India BioPharma Summit

The USA-India Chamber of Commerce's annual US-India BioPharma Summit, which will take place at Hyatt Cambridge on June 13, 2008, has evoked strong interest among participants and the organizers see a very high level of interest and participation. It has become a significant biopharma event in the world, focused on US-India life sciences and healthcare, according to Karun Rishi, president, USA-India Chamber of Commerce. Kapil Sibal, minister of science and technology, will be the keynote speaker at the summit. Other confirmed keynote speakers are Dr Surinder Singh, drug controller general of India and Dr Joshua Boger, CEO of Vertex Pharmaceuticals and chairman of the Biotechnology Industry Organization (BIO).

"We are very pleased with the participation results", said Karun Rishi. "The industry and the investment community have recognized the importance and high quality of our annual summit", he added. Prominent participants include Dr Gary Stiles, chief medical officer, Wyeth; Dr William Chin, vice president, discovery research, Eli Lilly; Dr Mark Powell, worldwide head, pharma development, Bristol Myers Squibb; Dr John Leonard, senior vice president, R&D, Abbott; and Jim Mullen, CEO, Biogen Idec.

Over 30 prominent life sciences and healthcare focused venture capitalists and private equity investors have confirmed their participation till date, Karun Rishi informed. "The Indian industry will be well represented by people like Venkat Jasti, vice chairman, Suven Life Sciences; Arun Chandavarkar, COO, Biocon; CSN Murthy, CEO, Aurigene; Dr Rashmi Barbhaiya, CEO, Advinus and senior executives from Dr Reddy's Labs, GVK Biosciences, Orchid Pharma, Biovel, Strand Life Sciences", he said. Over 30 Indian companies have confirmed their participation till end of May. Several professors and deans of prestigious universities like Harvard Medical School, Tufts Medical School, Harvard School of Public Health, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Boston University are participating.

Novel course in nanobiotechnology

Bangalore-based Xpression Biotek has developed different R&D collaborations with Nanobiotechnology program of Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, a Tamil Nadu state government university. Recently it signed an MoU on starting an industry-university joint program, MSc in Nanobiotechnology, which is first of its kind in India.

Commencing in July 2008, the two-year course will provide highly practical-oriented training based on industry needs. The teaching faculty (including guest faculty) will comprise professionals from national and international nanotech and biotech companies and institutes, said Dr SG Vincent, Co-ordinator, nanobiotechnology program, Centre for Marine Science and Technology (CMST), Marthandam, and member, scientific advisory committee, Xpression Biotek.

The MoU was exchanged between Cynthia Pandian, vice-chancellor of MS University, and S Kasthurirengar, director, Xpression Biotek. Pandian said that the CMST had the potential of becoming a Center of Excellence in the years to come. Mohan Kumar, CEO, Xpression Biotek, expressed happiness over Xpression Biotek's association with CMST of MS University. Incidentally Xpression Biotek has its R&D wing at Marthandam in Kanyakumari district, Tamil Nadu. The MS University also offers specialized courses in biotechnology such as MSc in Environmental Biotechnology and MSc in Marine Biotechnology.

Praj all rosy on white biotech

Praj Industries would now move beyond its forte in biofuels to industrial realms of biotechnology. Its next R&D action would now focus on probing further in the billions of dollar worth of opportunity in industrial biotech as predicted by McKinsey. This would be kicked-off with assessment and action in areas like biopolymers and bioremediation to start with.

The company recently inaugurated an integrated biotech R&D center, Praj Matrix, which, in addition to continuing with ethanol and feedstock technology, would dedicate resources and focus to industrial biotechnology. The first phase of this lab would consume five acres and Rs 30 crore. About 60 percent of the current 60-member team would be channelized to industrial biotech. "We are recruiting PhDs in addition to professionals from the US", said Dr SV Ramakrishna, group adviser and head, R&D, Praj Industries.

Intas plans to launch Filgrastim in North America, Europe

Intas Biopharmaceuticals (IBPL) signed business agreement with CanadaÃ¢â?¬â??based Apotex Inc. for co-development and supply of its Filgrastim brand, Neukine in North America (US and Canada). European pharmaceutical major Kwizda Pharma, who is working with IBPL to develop G-CSF for the European market, has transferred all of its rights in IBPL's G-CSF to Apotex. Both, Apotex and IBPL, jointly, plan to launch Neukine in the US market.

Speaking on the development, Mani Iyer, executive director, IBPL, said, "This business deal brings together two companies having respective expertise in niche areas of operations. IBPL and Apotex have complementary strengths, which will help in launching the first GCSF generic in North America. IBPL and Apotex are eying a significant share of total G-CSF market in North America and Europe, which is currently estimated to be around $1.4 billion annually. Although guidelines for biosimilar product registration in North America are not yet finalized, the companies anticipate that there would be a clear pathway for biotech companies, once the legislation is in place.

As far as IBPL is concerned, North America and Europe are ideal markets to serve the goal of developing innovative research technologies/new molecules related to biopharmaceuticals; evaluate technology platforms; identify partnership opportunities, in-licensable IPs; and to build up Novel Drug Delivery System. IBPL and Apotex are keen to explore prospective business opportunities for more biosimilar products in the coming years."

Dr Jeremy B Desai, executive vice president, R&D, Apotex, added, "This agreement represents an important milestone for Apotex, as it strengthens the organization's development in Europe and will offer support for entering this important market with future biosimilar products currently in the Apotex development pipeline".

Dr Helmut Brunar, vice president, research and business development, Kwizda Pharma, explained mutual benefits of the agreement: "It is part of Kwizda Pharma's current business strategy to work together with non-European pharmaceutical companies to break into the European market. That is why we worked with IBPL to successfully complete a phase I clinical trial and have transferred our rights in IBPL's G-CSF to Apotex including initiation of a phase III trial for the approval of G-CSF in Europe".

Intas to market lung cancer drug Gefitinib in India

Intas Biopharmaceuticals is all set to market lung cancer drug, Gefitinib, under brand name Geffy in the Indian market. In line with company's sales strategy to market novel targeted therapies, Intas Biopharmaceuticals will market Geffy for treatment of lung cancer, especially non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC). The new drug Geffy is a class of anti-cancer medications called epidermal growth factor receptor (EGFR) tyrosine kinase inhibitors. It works by blocking the action of a certain naturally occurring substance that may be needed to help cancer cells multiply.

Announcing the marketing launch of Geffy, Simon Daniel, chief executive, marketing, Intas Biopharmaceuticals, said, "The introduction of Geffy in our product basket is going to strengthen our domestic market share for the lung cancer market. With increase prevalence of smoking, lung cancer has reach epidemic proportions in India. It has surpassed the earlier form of cancer that of oropharynx, and now is the commonest malignancy in males. In addition to smoking, occupational exposure to carcinogens indoor air pollution and dietary factors have recently been implicated in the causation of lung cancer. In view of our large population, the burden of lung cancer will be enormous in India. As of today, drugs, catering to lung cancer, have

market potential of approximately Rs 80 crore in India. With introduction of Geffy in our product basket, we look to tap nearly 15Ã¢â?¬â??20 percent of total lung cancer market in the first year."

iOWH announces advisory board

The Institute for OneWorld Health, the US-based non-profit pharmaceutical company that develops drugs for people with infectious diseases in the developing world, has announced its Strategic Advisory Board to support the iOWH Diarrheal Disease Program (DDP).

OneWorld Health recently completed a robust five-year strategic plan to inform the future direction and expansion of the diarrheal disease portfolio and programs. Each year more than two million children in developing countries die from these diseases, caused by a wide range of bacterial, parasitic, and viral pathogens. OneWorld Health is assembling a portfolio of product candidates that will address various aspects of diarrheal diseases, with a special focus on the needs of infants and young children.

Dr David A Sack has been appointed the chair of iOWH's DDP Strategic Advisory Board.

Lifestyle changes helping Indian pharma growth

Lifestyle changes in India is fuelling the growth of Indian pharma sector and if indications are right, the industry, already growing faster than the world average, might double its business in just five years.

A new market report, "Indian Pharma Sector Analysis," by RNCOS says the Indian pharmaceutical industry grew by approximately12 percent during the period 2001-02 to 2006-07 and its current growth rate is double of that of the global pharma market.

And according to the report, in 2006, the Indian domestic market sales, excluding hospital and institutional sales, stood at over $7 billion and is anticipated to cross $20 billion by 2015.

Moreover, the growth of the Indian pharmaceutical market is anticipated to be higher than other markets, placing the country at 10th place by 2015 against 14th place in 2005.

The boost in the Indian pharmaceutical market is largely given by the rise in annual household income, says the RNCOS report, as the country's economy has been growing at a rapid pace for last ten years.

Bharat Biotech completes phase I/II clinical trial for 116E rotavirus vaccine

The Indian Rotavirus Vaccine Development Project (RVDP) has announced encouraging results from a recent phase I/II clinical trial of a live, natural reassortant, Oral Rotavirus Vaccine 116E (ORV 116E), conducted in New Delhi, India. RVDP is a collaborative effort with support and guidance from the Department of Biotechnology; PATH; US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); Stanford University; US National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID); Society for Applied Studies; National Institute of Immunology, New Delhi; Indo-US Vaccine Action Program; All India Institute of Medical Sciences and Bharat Biotech.

Rotavirus infections are the single largest cause of severe diarrheal disease among infants and children worldwide and cause more than 500,000 deaths in infants and children each year, with 90 percent of these deaths occurring in the world's poorest countries. Rotavirus diarrhea causes more than 120,000 deaths in India alone.

The phase I/II trial was designed as a double-blind randomized placebo controlled dose escalating study of ORV 116E in healthy non-malnourished infants of 8-20 weeks of age with safety and immunogenicity as the primary and secondary objectives, respectively. The study was conducted by the Society for Applied Studies in New Delhi.

The doses selected for administration were 104.0 and 105.0 FFU with reactogenicity, immunogenicity and viral shedding as the study endpoints. One-hundred and eighty-seven infants were enrolled for the 104.0 FFU dosage and 182 were enrolled for the 105.0 FFU dosage.

ORV 116E was well tolerated after three administrations with no differences observed in mild, moderate or severe adverse events among vaccine and placebo recipients in both the 104.0 and 105.0 FFU dosages. ORV 116E was immunogenic with 62.1 percent and 89.7 percent of the infants seroconverting after three doses of the 104.0 and 105.0 FFU dosages, respectively. These favorable early clinical results are encouraging and warrant further development of ORV 116E as a new rotavirus vaccine for young infants in developing world settings.

GVK Biosciences signs drug discovery pact with Wyeth Pharma

GVK Biosciences has entered into a research agreement with Wyeth Pharmaceuticals, a division of Wyeth, to discover drug candidates focused on pre-defined discovery targets. GVK Bio will utilize in-house capabilities in discovery chemistry, informatics, biology and ADME to advance this program.

GVK Bio will be responsible for identifying drug candidates, which will be transferred to Wyeth to advance these compounds towards clinical studies.

Under the agreement, GVK Bio will receive initial payments well as success-based milestone payments based on the research progress.

G V Sanjay Reddy, managing director, GVK Biosciences said, "It is a momentous occasion for us. GVK Bio has had a successful partnership with Wyeth on various chemistry research activities dating to 2006. This research agreement expands our work together and builds on GVK Bio's core strengths. This agreement further validates India's capability to do innovative research along with leading pharmaceutical and biotech companies".

The collaborative research SBUs (Strategic Business Unit) of GVK Bio focuses on innovation led discovery activities like generating hits, advancing hit compounds/chemical series to identify drug candidates and developing backup/fast follower programs. This SBU uses GVK Bio's state-of the-art informatics databases, collaborative research integrates expertise in medicinal chemistry, computational chemistry, in-vitro and in-vivo biology, ADME and toxicity capabilities to collaborate with leading life-sciences companies to advance research.

GSK opens its technical development center

GlaxoSmithKline Pharmaceuticals launched its technical development center in Nashik, Maharashtra. This is GSK's new state-of-the-art technical development center in India. It is intended to cater to the international market for pharmaceutical evaluation by utilizing the expertise of highly skilled Indian scientists and engineers, with the latest computerized facilities, conforming to international standards.

The center was inaugurated by Jean-Paul Reynaud, senior vice president, regional pharma supply, in the presence of Kay-Yong Tan, vice president, India and China, sourcing supply and Dr Ashoke Banerjee, executive director, GSK India.

The center will develop knowledge in the form of process and product understanding by utilizing design of experiments, chemometrics and other lean sigma tools. The new center will support the development of solid, liquid and semisolid dosage forms along with analytical and packaging enhancements.

Strides, Genepharm sign definitive agreements

Strides Arcolab has signed definitive agreements with Genepharm Australasia (GAA). Under the agreement, Strides will vend its Australian and Asian business in exchange for the issue of shares in Genepharm, subject to approval of Genepharm shareholders.

Strides has acquired a relevant interest over 17.7 percent of the issued shares in ASX-listed Genepharm under a share acquisition agreement with a group of Genepharm shareholders based in Cyprus that are associated with Genepharm's largest shareholder, Genepharm Asia Pacific Enterprises Limited (GAPE Transaction). When added to the existing 2.1 percent of Genepharm shares over which Strides currently has a relevant interest, the GAPE Transaction takes Strides' total relevant interest in Genepharm issued shares to approximately 19.8 percent.

On successful completion of the Genepharm Transaction, Strides may emerge with a shareholding of approximately 55 percent of the expanded capital base of Genepharm.