

DST Seeks Advice On Usage of R&D Fund

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Recently, the DST in association with the University of Hyderabad organized a brainstorming session on Pharma R&D Support Fund in Hyderabad to seek recommendations from the industry and the academia.

In yet another attempt to boost the arrival of India on the global biotech radar, the Department of Science and Technology (DST), Government of India, in its recent budget has announced a corpus of Rs 150 crore. While this is a resilient enough move, the department is barraged with the effective utilization of the fund.

Seeking recommendations from the industry and the academia, DST in association with University of Hyderabad organized a brainstorming session on Pharma R&D Support Fund in Hyderabad. The event saw the gathering of nearly 50 industry leaders and more than 30 academic experts.

Recommendations:

During the session, Prof V S Ramamurthy, secretary, DST, said, "A quality drug yet at lower price is what our country has to offer. There is a need for setting up of cost effective infrastructure facilities including shared testing laboratories, HRD improvement and upgrading the existing research facilities. Focusing on specific issues we can compete provided DST supporting research."

• Creation of centralized facility that could be used by industry and academia is essential.

He further stated that research centers will also help the industry posed a problem, but with funds available now, how to use it effectively has facilitated easier access to the materials. Equally the industry was not willing to use it for some reasons. They had this feeling that such research partnerships will not work. Of those who wanted to utilize these funds had issues like confidentiality, commitment of professors till the end of the project, and if DST can ensure support funding for the whole program," he said.

• Single window clearance for proposals since time pass is loss of money.

Citing government's commitment to the industry, Ramamurthy said, "The Technology Development Board set up in 1996 has so far supported 140 programs with close to 40 projects in drug pharma research. Of the total investment of around Rs 650 crore, TDB had invested close to Rs 200 crore while the rest was from the industry. It is evident enough that there is acute shortage of facilities to conduct research and accredited laboratories. Eventually, we have to use this fund benefiting the community as a whole for the industry."

• Patenting expenditure to be borne partially by the department to lessen the expenditure incurred besides setting up of an additional cell to help registering patents.

It may be recalled that during the eighth plan, there was fund allocation of Rs 10 crore. So far the TDB has approved 80 projects besides the Planning Commission allocating Rs 25 crore. The Board had also funded five loans last year in the field of clinical trials costing around Rs 50 crore. For eleven years, from 1994-95 to 2004-05, DST has supported projects worth Rs 182 crore of which Rs 105 crore was from the industry while Rs 77 crore was from the department. But for the year 2005-06, the fund allocation is about Rs 150 crore and with the IPR regime in place, many a companies are focusing on R&D but badly need support and it is the form of infrastructure, HRD improvement or laboratories.

• Project based funding that would help forward.

Briefing the media, Ramamurthy said, "The proposed Pharmaceuticals Research and Development Fund (PRDSF) of Rs 150 crore would be given in the form of grants and loans. Of this, Rs 70 crore is the grant amount to aid institutions and Rs 80 crore will be the loan amount at simple interest of three per cent. This is the first session we are having in Hyderabad. Helping the auto clinical research interest of the equipment with essential strategy and having conducted three or more such sessions."

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Sunitha Natti, CyberMedia News

- Toxicology testing facility and pharmacogenetic testing.
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