BioSpect
the business of Bi
24 years of leveraging the business of Bio
www.biospectrumindia.co

Ã¢â?¬Å?Technology and healthcare are inseparableÃ¢â?¬?

24 October 2013 | Interviews | By Rahul Koul Koul

Ã¢â?¬Å?Technology and healthcare are inseparableÃ¢â?¬?



Medical experts from all over India, discussed the most up-to-date standards in clinical application of biomarkers for early diagnosis and better prognosis at the third edition of Alere Biomarker Conclave on October 5-6, 2013. Below are the details of eclusive interaction held by BioSpectrum with Mr Sanjeev Johar, CEO, Alere India, who spoke on various aspects of the industry.

Â **Q: How important are the biomarkers for diagnostics?**

Biomarkers have come to occupy an important place in our diagnostic procedures. They not only improve diagnostic accuracy, but also provide information about the present disease state, thereby aiding clinicians in deciding how aggressively the disease needs to be treated. We have been trying to create awareness about these vital investigative modalities by organizing the conclaves in various cities of India. This year in Gurgaon, the discussions at the conclave, focused on newer biomarkers and guidelines.

Q Please tell us about the medical devices market? What are the latest trends?

The growth of this industry has been close to $ 2 billion and is growing at 12-13 percent per annum. I agree with the most of the predicted reports that in next 3-5 years, this industry is expected to grow at a much faster rate and go upto $ 4-5 billion.

Â

Traditionally, India has been focused on laboratory research. We believe that the technology will move out of the lab and get closer to point of care which is right now going up. We believe that much attention is needed for the smarter devices that are closer to patients and help in early prevention and treatment. The healthcare system is getting sophisticated each passing day due to technological interventions. Apart from insurance factor and government too is pushing it harder. Other combination of factors too are helping it grow.

Q Has the benefit of devices really reached rural areas where basic healthcare amenities still seem to be missing?

Among the major roadblocks are the lack of infrastructure and awareness. Even in big cities where technology is available, things are way behind. Forget patients, even the doctors there are also not aware sometimes about the availability of tests. The basic amenities for ensuring proper treatment is also absent in far off rural areas. However, I don't think cost is an issue any more. Both quantitative and qualitative tests are priced almost similarly. In some cases, cost was earlier a factor but now it is not.

Q What is you take on the regulatory scenario?

I feel that regulators understand the needs but the stumbling block is that they are not properly staffed. Under the circumstances, I would say that they are doing a good job. However, the major area of concern is that there will be new devices and the regulators too have to brush up their knowledge on the trends in Europe and US. Normal tendency should be not be that this imported technology is new and now we therefore can't allow it due to unawareness. That would be unfortunate. So it is advisable for them to remain abreast on such new technologies and innovations as well.

Q: Where do you stand now? Are you planning to move into other areas?

We have most comprehensive product portfolio in diverse areas such as cardiovascular, toxicological and women health. With all the key component, we believe that we are in a very good position to influence the trends. We are one of the fastest growing diagnostic company. Standing at Rs 250 crore, the company has close to doubled sales in last two years. In next five years, we have a target of Rs 500 crores. Alere has come up with a very innovative device which doesn't need any paramedical expert to run it. You can put it next to patient and get the result in minutes. We consider ourselves a the market leader but we believe that we are yet to even scratch the surface. In five years time, we definitely will become the powerhouse. We believe that we can make a difference by helping the clinicians and patients alike.

We will stay in our areas of primary interest but we feel that a lot of value can be created for the patients through innovation. Though we are innovation driven company and in lookout of technologies with commercial value, it is not always the western technologies that come to fore at our end. Here at our company, we look at emerging techniques and markets and the needs. We tap the indigenous technologies.

Q: What kind of technological rends can you foresee in next decade?

Let me first of all quote an example. The government has been spending millions of dollars on the Anti Retro Viral Therapy (ART) programme. There must be roughly 300-400 ART centres across the country. Monitoring is an important part of the process but we see that the patients don't come back after sometime. The reason is that in a village, a patient has to spend Rs 200 as transportation charges to visit doctor.We have come up with PIMA, an important point of care product for ART testing. You can't bring patient to center but you have to bring technology to patient instead. That is the way this industry is moving. It is a small device that can be even mounted on a bike. These kind of technologies can be really useful for a nation like ours.

Pune based National AIDS Research Institute (NARI) did a study on this technology and found it useful. We are now convincing the government to make it mandatory fr the managing HIV patients on ART treatment. There are many new exciting technologies in the other fileds such as Tuberculosis. Once we have regulatory approvals on these product in TB, we shall speak exclusively on them in next six months.