BioSpectrum the business of Bio & Health Sciences

Competition heats up in oncology market

27 August 2013 | Features | By Rahul Koul Koul

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The cutthroat competition is a big concern since quite a few domestic companies and all the major multinationals have a presence in this segment in India. The depleting price realization of oncology medicines has posed a serious threat to the viability of this segment. Besides, due to low affordability and unorganised healthcare services, a large section of patients remains untapped and deprived of medical treatment, making the expandability of the market difficult. In such a scenario, neither the patient nor the manufacturer is benefiting.

According to Shukrit Chimote, head, Branded Formulations-India, Biocon, "Though the average life expectancy and the cancer detection rates have steadily gone up in India over the past decade leading to increasing number of patients on cancer treatment, the Oncology market growth seems to be stagnating off late. Also, the access to quality oncology healthcare and availability of affordable medicines to large tracts of rural population remains a key challenge for the public health administrators and could be a big opportunity for exploring public-private partnerships."

The market also faces regulatory hurdles, like approvals for oncology trial procedures. In addition, tight budgets act to further restrict use of new therapies in oncology. Differential pricing of expensive drugs is another challenge. Infrastructure to handle the high incidence of cancer is still very poor in India. India does not have adequate number of comprehensive cancer treatment centers and in a country where cancer incidence is increasing at rate of 2-3% CAGR it's a huge challenge.

Today the country has 1 million new cancer patients according to 2011 (source: national cancer registry) and it will grow at a rate of 16% in the next 5 years. As per F&S report, India has close to 1,600 oncologists (including medical, surgical and radiation oncologists), thereby creating a huge shortage of surgical oncologists followed by medical oncologists. There are 30 RCCs (regional cancer centers) of which only 5 to 6 RCCs have adequately trained medical oncologists.

Biocon's BIOMAb EGFR holds promise

With several promising indications such as oesophageal cancer, cervical cancer, lung cancer, etc, Biocon is currently conducting several clinical trials at various centers in India. In collaboration with the HCG Group of Hospitals, Biocon is conducting an Investigator Initiated Trial to study the effects of Nimotuzumab in 110 cervical cancer patients. According to the company, a robust Post Marketing Surveillance study of BIOMAb EGFR® is in progress at the Tata Memorial Hospital with over 530 head & neck cancer patients. In addition, four large scale Phase III international trials (two in head and neck cancer, one in lung cancer and one in gastric cancer) are ongoing to establish Nimotuzumab's 'best-in-class' status for the treatment of various cancers.

DRF works big time on cancer stem cell

DRF has taken several steps to face the challenges ahead. Among the cancer stem cells, there is a growing body of evidence accumulating which suggests that cancer stem cells exist in a variety of tumors. DRF has spent last several months understanding the intricacies of working with human stem cells and is now geared up to initiate preclinical studies in this exciting new field that holds so much promise for treating cancer. Having developed its own peptide based kinase inhibitor in the past, DRF is well versed and thus currently looking at developing newer and safer drugs.

Venus Remedies bets big on DPPC technology

The Venus Medicine Research Centre (VMRC) has developed a target-based onco delivery model, specially for breast cancer which is in early stages of development. The 12 products in late-phase development are expected to generate sales of $2,954m by 2018. The company has up with an innovative patent-protected platform technology called Drug Protein Polymer Conjugate (DPPC) that does specific and selective targeting.