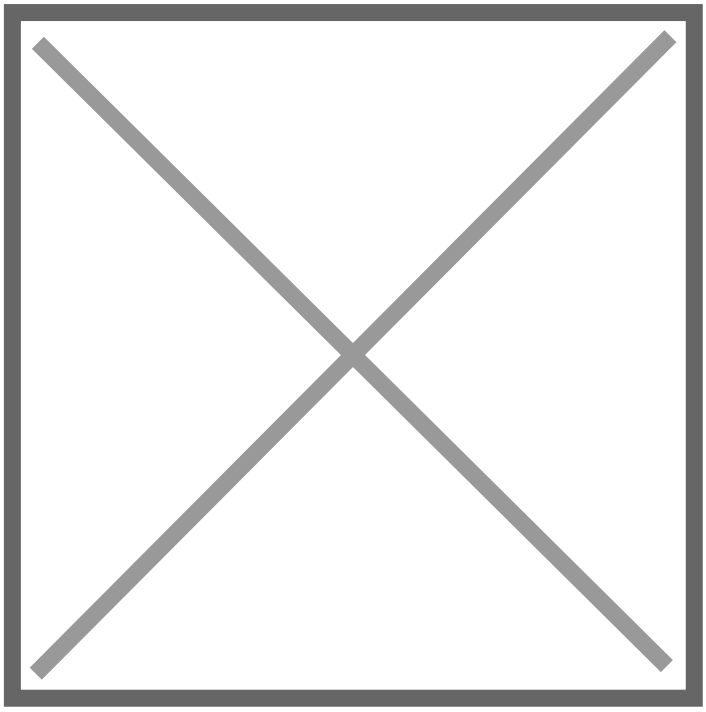
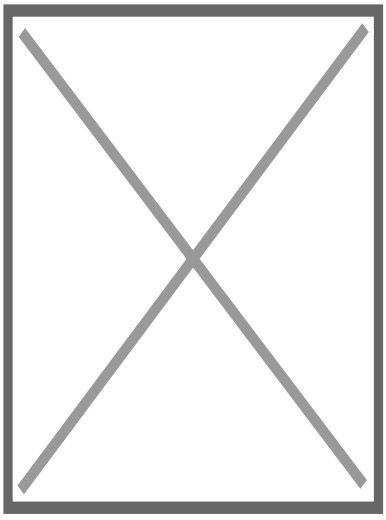
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"The UK is the most popular location in Europe for investment in pharma and biotech R&D"

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-David Hawkins, life science consultant, UK Trade and Investment

As far as the life sciences market is concerned, the UK has always been regarded as the gateway to Europe. Today many innovative products come from the UK-based companies in addition to its strength in drug discovery and services. These attributes, David Hawkins, life science consultant, UK Trade and Investment, believes, makes the UK an ideal partner for Indian pharma and biotech companies. In an interview, Hawkins, who has 30 years of experience in the international pharmaceuticals business and an extensive experience in the emerging markets, talks about the UK life sciences market, its strengths and India as an attractive destination for the UK Excerpts:

Can you briefly tell us about the life sciences industry in the UK?

In the UK, the life sciences industry is a wide market with keen support from the international market. The strength of the UK life sciences market lies in its confidence in giving new ideas to the world. Today, the whole lot of the techniques used internationally comes from the UK. However, there has not been much growth. It is probably less than 10 percent these days. This is because the UK life sciences industry is an amalgamation of various small sectors and is a diverse market. There are

certain segments that have grown much more than the others. In biotech, if you look at Europe today, the UK is leading. And there is no doubt about that. Half the work in biotech in Europe comes from the UK and that keeps increasing over time. If you look at the global scenario, biotechnology as an industry still needs to prove itself in terms of new companies that are coming up but the UK has a growing number of companies and the growth never stops. Even the number of people in the industry is growing rapidly. Around 20,000 people in the UK are today involved in the biotech industry, which generates revenues of $5 billion. Even research in biotech products is in the process. The UK will be a major source for a number of products, which will come to the global market.

R&D in the UK has been a major growth area for its life sciences industry. Can you elaborate on this scenario?

The UK bioscience and healthcare sector is globally recognized as being world class, with particular expertise in medical devices, pharmaceuticals, biopharmaceuticals and the exploitation of bioscience by the industry. The UK is the most popular location in Europe for investment in pharmaceutical and biotechnology R&D. It has particular R&D specializations in medical devices-developing and manufacturing nonpharmaceutical products for improved healthcare targeting, prevention, diagnosis (including medical imaging), treatment and rehabilitation, pharmaceuticals (including radiopharmaceuticals), biopharmaceuticals Ã¢â?¬â?? discovery, development and manufacture of pharmaceuticals, vaccines and therapies developed from new biotechnologies such as monoclonal antibodies, recombinant proteins, gene, cell and tissue therapies.

There have been talks about collaboration between the UK CROs and Indian CROs. How will such a nexus be beneficial to both parties?

Well I think both sides will be benefited immensely from the collaboration. From the UK perspective, I feel collaboration is absolutely necessary. India is able to provide to our companies a huge source of untapped patients and the maximum number of clinical trials take place here in India. No other country conducts as many trials. So from the UK companies' point of perspective, India is able to offer a large pool of patient, some very efficient people with technical knowledge, people who speak English which bridges communication gaps. From the Indian perspective, it does mean new drugs coming in and better quality trials which are done much quicker than before. Those are the benefits that can come about with collaboration between the two countries. In the past we have had companies like Clintec coming here to India. Now looking at the opportunities, several companies from the UK are doing work here and now smaller companies are also interested in collaboration.

India have an advantage for the UK CRO companies, but then owing to the emergence of Eastern Europe, which offers the same advantages as India, and its geographical proximity, there is a possibility of the UK CROs diverting their attention. What are your views?

I do not think so, because in terms of population you cannot compare both the regions. In Eastern Europe, the population is around 100 million and hence the patient population is also small. And to recruit people you need fast numbers. So you really cannot compare it with India as far as the potential is concerned. India is so much better as far as the patient contribution is concerned. So on one hand, yes, the UK CROs are targeting markets like Romania, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Also there are regions like the South East Asian countries --Singapore. Thailand, Malaysia, but this is a well established business and not a new market. Also there are markets like the US and other parts of Europe. But new markets like India hold better prospects for us.

What are the strengths of the UK life sciences market and how does it have an edge over other markets?

The strength is primarily in knowledge. In the UK, we depend largely on services and so knowledge plays a vital role. We have a larger pool of knowledge than any other country in the world where the healthcare sector is more fragmented. Here new techniques and procedures have developed. These new procedures are generally more available to be shared amongst people around the world. From the academic side, a lot of universities in the UK, like Cambridge for instance, and some in London have been involved in a lot of research work and studies So the UK is fortunate to have a good pool and this pool not just consists of people from the UK but also from other parts of the world like India and other countries. The UK market has the ability to draw the top skilled people from all parts of the world.

The European market, especially the UK, is said to be matured and saturated and now companies are looking at emerging markets. Will that be a setback for the life sciences industry in the UK?

It is matured but in actual terms it is a huge market and thus has a lot of opportunities. At the end of the day it is quality that matters and even today a lot of companies still go to the major market no matter how mature it is. It is proven in matured countries like Germany, the US and the UK.

Nayantara Som