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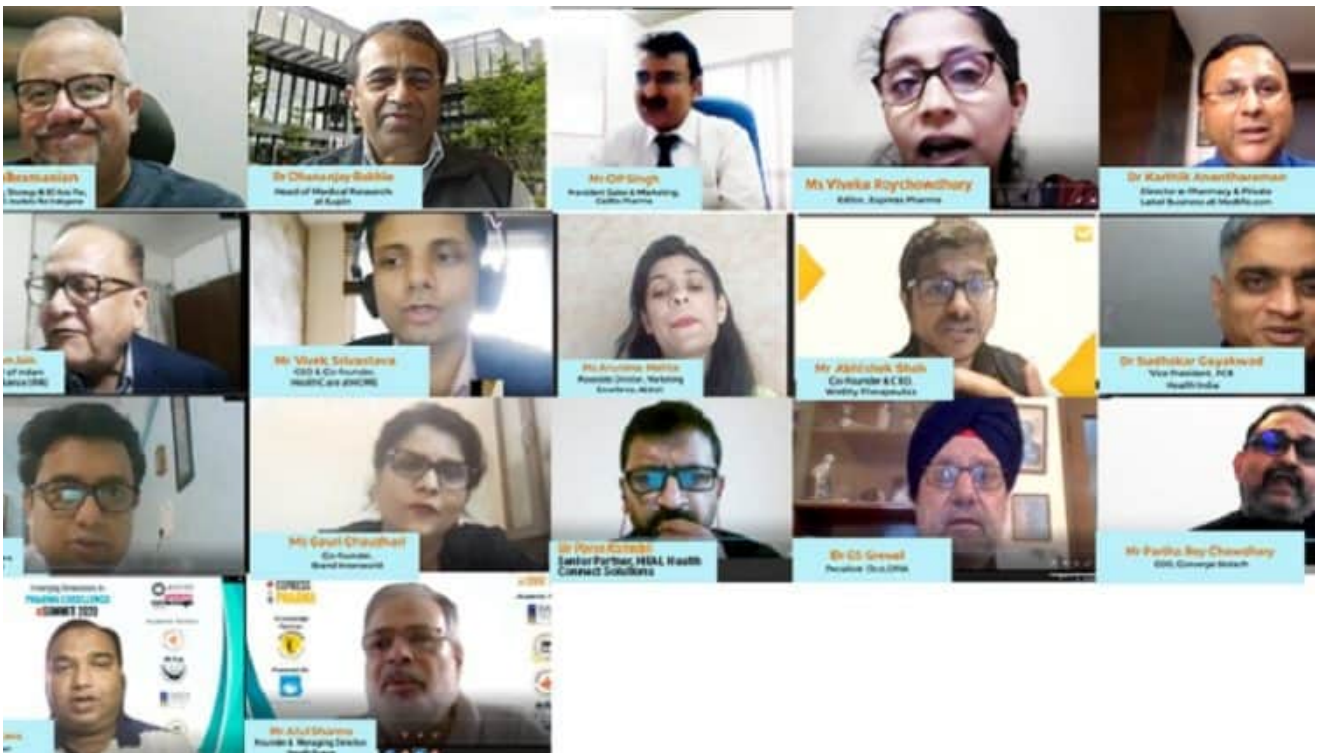
HEAL Health Connect Solutions hosts Emerging Dimensions in Pharma Excellence e-Summit

Experts discuss challenges faced by the pharma industry due to COVID-19 pandemic and deliberate on strategies to survive these tough times and thrive in the days to come at the virtual event, organised in collaboration with Express Pharma

By EXPRESS PHARMA By EP News Bureau

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HEAL Health Connect Solutions, in collaboration with Express Pharma, recently organised the 'Emerging Dimensions in Pharma Excellence e-Summit'.

What sort of challenges did the pharma industry go through during COVID-19 times? How has digital adoption been helpful and successful? How will the new decade of pharma industry post-COVID-19 play out? And what will be the challenges for pharma MSME and the solutions? These were some of the important topics discussed at length during the e-Summit.

The keynote speaker was Sudarshan Jain, Secretary-General of Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance (IPA). He said, "COVID-19 has posed the greatest humanitarian challenge, however, in such a time of crisis, the healthcare and pharma industries have played an important role. And more significantly, India has been at the forefront in repurposing the drugs as it has a large share in supplying drugs to the world. The role of India has been immense in maintaining the supply chain to the world. Now, the Indian pharma industry is gearing up not only for 'Make in India' but also for 'Make for the world'.

"The Indian pharma industry has already been exporting drugs to 206 countries, and it will grow more, showing a new path to the world, not only in manufacturing drugs but also in R&D," he added.

The first session was on the topic: 'Challenges faced by pharma industry in COVID times'. The speakers for this session discussed and deliberated on how pharma companies are responding to the rapid challenges arising from the disruption in supply chains and the need for change in existing business processes.

Dr Karthik Anantharaman, Director ePharmacy & Private Label Business at Medlife.com said, "Every adversity has a silver lining. The COVID-19 pandemic has driven digitisation in the pharma industry. The Research & Development processes have been changed. Tele consultations have been increasing. There has been a potential increase in the demands of anti-diabetic, respiratory and gastroenterology drugs during COVID. The trend of e-Pharmacy and e-Consultation have been increasing. Discussion for API in India has been gaining ground. Behavioural change in doctors has been taking place as they are turning digital. Now doctors (KOLs) are turning DOLs. Overall digital transformation is prevalent."

Suresh Subramanian, Lead Consultant, Solutions, Strategy & BD, Asia Pac, Emerging and other Ex-US markets for Indegene informed, "COVID-19 has brought several changes in the old order. There is an emergence of e-pharmacy, telemedicine and home isolation care. In the pandemic, due to physical distancing, we have started

adopting digital mediums. The advancement of AI has enabled us to reimagine business models for the pharma industry. Digital therapy algorithms are getting developed.”

Dr Dhananjay Bhakhle, Head of Medical Research at Lupin, highlighted, “The COVID-19 pandemic has posed so many problems before mankind. However, excellent human performance has made us combat the crisis. Initially, we also faced challenges. But, we have 10 manufacturing units across the country with 9000 workers. Most of the pharma companies are working proactively to ensure the supply chain. Things will turn normal soon, and the post-COVID-19 phase looks fruitful.”

OP Singh, President Sales & Marketing, Cadila Pharma, “We have worked non-stop ever since the COVID-19 started, considering humanitarian needs. For immediate relief, we have also followed the most feasible process of ‘Repurposing of drugs’, which has helped in combating the pandemic and saving the lives of people. For example, Sepsis has been repurposed for the treatment of COVID-19 and found to be efficacious. It has also saved lots of lives as it has been instrumental in helping develop innate immunity. Now, the Indian pharma industry is heading towards innovation.”

Viveka Roy Chowdhury, Editor, Express Pharma, “During COVID-19 pandemic, patients have faced tremendous problems in terms of the availability of drugs due to the disruption of the supply chain. And this crisis has led to black marketing. I think from peoples’ perspective that the supply chain must be ensured to have a check on the black marketing until vaccines come into place. One good thing we see that the pharma companies are reaching out to the patients directly. This sort of initiative will bring transparency. We expect more humanitarian solutions from the pharma industry. They should perceive that it is not only about selling but also about serving. Pharma companies also need to ensure that the supply chain is delivered properly to have a check over the black marketing. As a media, we will be doing our best bit.”

The second session focused on the topic, ‘Digital Adoption: How much have we been successful?’ It highlighted how pharma companies have to adapt to the new normal and work closely with doctors to bring out a comprehensive healthcare delivery system in these tough times.

Vivek Srivastava, Co-founder & CEO, HealthCare at Home stated, “I have seen large scale digital adoption across the country during COVID-19. Even in home isolation care, we have used digital platforms for consultations with the doctors. By the use of digital technology, we have treated almost 2500 odd patients in home isolation. We have

largely used telemedicine during home isolation. Now digital adoption has been turning a new normal and people are adapting fast with this. Digital adoption is booming everywhere including pharma marketing.”

Arunima Mehta, Associate Director, Marketing Excellence, Abbott apprised, “The restrictions of COVID-19 have led the healthcare industry to embrace digitisation at various spheres. Earlier, a medical representative hardly found 30 seconds for a face-to-face meeting with doctors, but now, through digital meetings, they are getting more time. Likewise, 30 per cent of HCPs have started using digital platforms, which is a remarkable change.”

Abhishek Shah, Co-founder & CEO, Wellthy Therapeutics said, “In the wake of COVID-19, everyone is seeking digital accessibility and it is happening in full swing. Patients are now demanding for digital tools. For so many chronic diseases such as asthma, diabetes and other respiratory problems, patients have started using digital tools. The trend of self-diagnostics with digital tools is increasing. Now digital platforms have become the fulcrum that will drive the ecosystem. The adoption is indeed fantastic, but how it is going to transform the ecosystem is yet to be seen.”

The topics for the third session was ‘The New Decade of Indian Pharma Industry Post COVID 19’. This session addressed the significance of understanding market dynamics and shifts in customer behaviour to chalk out growth plans in the future.

Dr Sudhakar Gayakwad, Vice-President, FCB Health India opined, “COVID-19 has given us an opportunity to rediscover ourselves. We started with lots of uncertainties, but by the time, we have learnt how to accommodate in the new normal. We are heading towards change. The doctor-patient relationship has completely changed. More and more patients are turning digital. This way we see that health-seeking behaviour has also changed. A new ecosystem in healthcare has been emerging. Online pharmacy is setting a new dimension of drugs delivery. Generic medicines are getting popular and hitting high demand.”

Dr Pratik Shah, Vice-President, Medical Affairs, Bharat Serum & Vaccine, updated, “In COVID-19, a lot has changed. And I have divided these changes into three buckets. First, I see in short term perspective, mid-term and long term. In the short term, we need to identify and discover how things are unfolding and what should be the way out if there are problems. The most pertinent point is ensuring how communication

between healthcare and pharma industry is delivered. Now, I see that through social and online media, we have been in touch with doctors, and these changes are taking place at a faster pace, but the traditional method should not be overlooked at all.”

Gauri Chaudhari, Co-founder, Brand Inner World detailed, “In my vision, I see that we need to evolve in term of communication with doctors and engaging other stakeholders. As per my experience what I have come across is that we have to evolve with here things in term of Insights, Context & Content (ICC) – this should be the tools for communication. Hence, marrying the evolving perspectives with these tools we can communicate well. There has been a surge in the use of e-Pharmacy. I spot five things that are going to happen post-COVID-19 – Think brand; Make a corporate brand strategy as everything is rushing into healthcare space; No push; Profit through purpose and educated patients means empowered patients.”

Dr G S Grewal, President-Elect, Delhi Medical Association (DMA) explained, “As far as the digital adoption is concerned, it is going great. We can’t survive without it. But simultaneously, we see that doctors are lagging in terms of digital adoption. And you believe or not but this is the grave reality that in Delhi, even 30 per cent of doctors didn’t have desktops in pre-COVID times. So, along with digital adoption, proper education and training are essential. Unless they are trained properly, they won’t be able to get the benefits out of this.”

The topic discussed in the last session of the event was ‘The Challenges of Pharma MSME & Solutions’. The COVID-19 outbreak and the subsequent lockdown affected pharma MSMEs adversely and its collective production decreased. As MSME’s play a major role in generating growth in the pharma sector, experts conferred on the challenges faced by pharma MSMEs with an aim to find solutions for their growth.

Dr Partha Roy Chowdhary, COO, Converge Biotech said, “The outbreak of COVID-19 has posed a lot of challenges. For the MSME sector, the greatest challenge is the flow of cash as the new products are in pipeline. In a situation, where the difference between demand and supply has widened largely, reaching out to the source of the business is the biggest challenge. Of the numerous routine problems, the odd configuration of the supply chain has been posing hindrance. Market trends suggest that supply chain will improve significantly, but we need to overcome the current problem.”

Pavan Karimbil, Senior Partner, HEAL Health Connect Solutions emphasised, “Of course, we have the largest MSME after China, and this is supposed to be the backbone of Indian economy. Due to COVID-19 upsurge followed by the lockdown, the

Indian MSME sector suffered the most with its collective production decreasing by more than 90 per cent. This sector comprises around 64 million enterprises and employs close to 120 million people. It contributes 30 per cent of India's GDP and constitutes 45 per cent of exports."

These discussions were jointly moderated by Atul Sharma, Founder & Managing Director, HealthScape and Dr Swadeep Srivastava, Founder & CEO, HEAL Health Connect Solutions. Both of them underlined that the pharma sector is bouncing back from the upheaval caused by the pandemic.

The moderators of these discussions Sharma said, "In the Indian pharma industry, manufacturing volumes after declining to 50 per cent-60 per cent in April 2020, given the strict lock-down, has improved significantly to 60 per cent-80 per cent of the original capacities during May-June 2020. In India, we have been in a reasonably good position in terms of the accessibility of the drugs as it is easily available over the counter compared to the eastern European countries."

Srivastava pointed out, "Although there has been a slump in the pharma industry in April-June quarter, from July the Indian pharma industry is bouncing back and is likely to grow at three to five per cent in size during FY 2020-2021 as per India Ratings and Research. In June, the demand for cardiac drugs registered the strongest growth of 15.9 per cent y-o-y in terms of value and anti-diabetic segment grew at 12.7 per cent y-o-y due to continued buying during the period of the lockdown."

Thus, there was knowledge sharing galore at the e-Summit on 'Emerging Dimensions in Pharma Excellence.'