

# Pharma stalwarts demystify COVID-19 impact on industry

*Reflecting on the learning during the pandemic, industry is aiming to push innovation in R&D and implement automation and digital technologies across various operational levels.*

By [Rahul Koul](#) | March 01, 2021



In the early days of the ongoing pandemic, the top pharmaceutical company bosses every Monday would hold a meeting with their top management and employees to take a stock of the situation. A regular ritual in most companies to the extent that it became a habit now, signaling a paradigm shift in the working of organizations. These insights came to the fore during a recent discussion held at CEO Conclave organized by Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance (IPA).

As per Pankaj Patel, Chairman, Cadila Healthcare, not following the COVID-19 behavior is the biggest challenge. Patel believes that it is time to start normalizing the physical operations to some extent in a phase-wise manner. "India has dodged the bullet but we must stay responsible. As far as pharma companies are concerned, they innovate and get into bigger and better markets, we need innovation, the way we train our people, the way

we analyze the data. We have to be ahead of the curve. The journey will require a lot of emphasis on quick adoption of technologies and collaboration."

Technology will have an impact on all aspects of our business, marketing, sales, manufacturing, mentions Dilip Shanghvi, MD, Sun Pharma who also points out how digital interventions could help improve the speed of product placement in the market. "Teleconsultation that was never taken seriously overnight became an important tool for remote consultation. Digitalization can help doctors to improve their operations. Doctors started attending the global conference as earlier many weren't interested in traveling."

Shanghvi believes that the COVID-19 virus is here to stay and needs effective treatment as a solution. He says there is a possibility that there would be an annual covid season like flu. "We need to improve our understanding of the disease. Vaccines will give long-term solutions but treatment is important for short-term mitigation."

Satish Reddy, Chairman, Dr Reddy's Laboratories lauds the role of the workforce in rising to the occasion and making continuity of business possible. He believes that the alacrity with which industry came together to solve the problems has set an example. "Since the COVID-19 pandemic continues to persist, we have to live with it and keep the safety aspect on. We have to increase the pace of vaccination and cover the whole population. We need to retain gains and adopt digitalization at a faster pace."

There is a shift from curative to preventive care, says Samina Hamied, Executive Chairperson, Cipla who feels there is a need for a lot of technology to be spun around as adherence to treatment and correct lifestyle are big challenges. "API and KSMs are high on agenda. The PLI scheme will provide a boost. Using the right digital format is a challenge for the industry. Technology plays a big role. The more automation you have, the more probability of human error goes down and quality improves."

Nilesh Gupta, MD, Lupin Ltd believes that the pandemic has created a lot of new opportunities and the industry must protect the benefits of a few of these activities. "Most of us have already started this journey. Be it big data and machine learning, we are trying to implement it in our organizations. When smaller sectors are doing it, there is no reason we can't. The convergence between pharma companies, insurance firms, and patients. The technology is fledgling at current times and we are looking at how will it become upscale."

## Way forward

Being generic players we can also think about creating novel approaches like new dosage forms, mentions Patel. He feels specialization will help companies to increase market share and provide value addition that will help beat competition. As per him, digital use in all the practices, be it marketing or manufacturing is going to stay. "Teleconsultancy will pick up and a lot of people will like to save time. Follow-up meetings for patients will happen digitally," he adds.

Gupta advises the industry to stay focused on what it wants to achieve. "On the top agenda should be innovative treatment options that solve unaddressed diseases. Regulators should improve their understanding and help in reducing the cost of drugs. Our aim should be to provide benefits to patients, improve their quality of sleep and adherence to treatment."

Betting big on automation, Hamied reveals that Cipla aims to go for it in a big way. She believes that for India to ensure a leadership position in generics, there is a need to maintain efficiency and level of interaction with the regulatory authority. "There must always be a culture about doing right things."

"We have worked hard to create a leadership position in generics on the world map. While we have a 40 percent share in the US and 60 percent globally, we have a responsibility to maintain consistency. I would like to thank regulators and their commitment to quality and we will live up to it. Also, the time has come when we must move from generics to innovation, says Shangvi in his concluding message.