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Covid-19 has highlighted the Indian pharma industry's potential in transforming into an innovation hub: Sudarshan Jain

Taking learning from the second wave, the industry is preparing proactively and intends to be ahead in terms of drug availability and facilitating collaboration across stakeholders.

Shahid Akhter ETHealthWorld June 18, 2021, 06:00 IST



Shahid Akhter, editor, ETHealthworld, spoke to **Sudarshan Jain**, Secretary General, Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance, to know more about the pharma industry's learnings, challenges and opportunities during the [Covid-19](#) pandemic.

What strategies should the pharmaceutical industry and other stakeholders adopt and

implement in future to address medicine shortages, whether caused by Covid or otherwise?

Unlike the first wave, we witnessed a steep rise in cases in the second wave due to virus mutants' high transmission rate. The pharma industry prioritised building production capacity and working with stakeholders to contain the adverse effects of the second wave.

As the world anticipates a possible third wave, the Indian pharma industry is preparing and taking a proactive approach to tackle it. Along with strategies for ramping production of essential [covid-19 drugs](#), collaborating with all relevant stake holders across supply chain of pharma industry from central, state to district level coordination. We are the second-most populous country in the world, hence inventorising of essential Covid-19 drugs and vaccines is necessary to meet the high demand.

Additionally, collaboration within the industry should continue to fast track the Covid-19 drugs and vaccine production. We have to focus on agility on the production and supply chain operations as the demand situation is unpredictable in the Covid environment.

How vital is collaboration between global and Indian pharma companies now that several Indian companies are bringing in medications to establish a strong Covid portfolio?

The pandemic is a global challenge that needs a global response. The convergence of global knowledge and expertise along with Indian pharmaceutical industry's scale and reach will help India in its fight against the pandemic. Several Indian pharma companies have entered partnership with global companies to accelerate the process of drug manufacturing and distribution. For instance, several Indian pharma companies such as Cipla, Dr Reddy's Laboratories, Hetero Labs, Jubilant Lifesciences had signed voluntary licensing agreements with Gilead Lifesciences for [Remdesivir](#). Baricitinib from Eli Lilly which is currently being manufactured in India has entered in to collaboration with Cipla, Lupin, Sun Pharma. Molnupiravir of MSD is being licensed through Cipla, Dr. Reddy's, Emcure, Hetero Labs and Sun Pharma.

Indian companies are working with global partners to provide the Covid-19 vaccines, for instance [Serum Institute](#) is working with AstraZeneca and also in arrangement with [Novavax](#). The voluntary licensing arrangement between the companies is likely to increase the vaccine availability in the months to come. Some of the examples for this case are Dr. Reddy's with RFID and Gamaleya National Research Center, and Biological E with Johnson & Johnson. These collaborations are fundamental for improved vaccine availability.

What initiatives are Indian companies taking to focus more on innovation and R&D to optimize their future potential?

The dramatically shifting landscape requires a quick action on technological advancements and innovation. Covid-19 has highlighted the Indian pharma industry's potential in transforming into an innovation hub in the coming years. Indian pharma companies are working to expand their product portfolio to

introduce innovative drugs to manufacture generics to cater to the growing patient pool globally.

The industry is channelising resources in strengthening the technological infrastructure and upskilling manpower for addressing any challenges concerning manufacturing and distribution. Moreover, it is important to build a culture of R&D to build an innovation ecosystem in India. R&D capabilities should be enhanced across all levels of the value chain to develop a fully functional innovation cycle and regulations should be streamlined to encourage industry at a large scale.

Based on your insights from Covid-19's second wave, how do you see Indian pharma making a significant breakthrough forward?

Despite the uncertain demand surge in the second wave, the Indian pharma industry worked continuously to ensure the availability of life-saving medicines. Companies manufacturing critical Covid-19 medicines ramped up their production to cater the needy patients. Going forward, Industry will be quick to respond to such dynamic situation by utilizing underused capacities and making the supply chains efficient and agile to ensure easy accessibility of the drugs.

Taking learning from the second wave, the industry is preparing proactively and intends to be ahead in terms of drug availability and facilitating collaboration across stakeholders. Stockpiling, building inventory of essential drugs and strengthening infrastructure in terms of hospital beds, oxygen supplies will be important in our preparation for likely challenges in case of Covid-19 third wave. Also, it will be important to emphasize Covid appropriate behaviour and safety measures to minimize the spread of the pandemic in view of high unpredictability.

How can AtmaNirbhar Bharat aid India's pharmaceutical industry? Why and how should Indian pharmaceutical businesses minimize their reliance on API imports?

For the pharma industry the idea of [Aatmanirbhar Bharat](#) goes beyond self-sufficiency. Along with accelerating domestic manufacturing, it will facilitate innovation and expand the global export base to create 'Brand India' in the global pharmaceutical space.

India is playing a pivotal role in supplying essential medicines to the world while making distribution more efficient and responsive in the country. The Indian pharma industry also called the 'pharmacy to the world' has successfully met the domestic needs while supplying 40 per cent of the generics demand of the US , and a quarter of Europe's. The government has taken active steps by releasing the PLI 1.0 and 2.0 schemes to take forward the AtmaNirbhar agenda for the pharmaceutical industry. These initiatives will be important to build on the strength

of the Indian pharmaceutical industry and be a dependable supplier of high quality affordable medicine around the globe for the benefit of patients.

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