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Covid-19 has unlocked new opportunities for the Indian pharma sector: Sudarshan Jain

Sudarshan Jain, secretary-general, Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance (IPA), speaks to The Indian Express on challenges related to the shortage of key Covid-19 drugs and the importance of collaboration between global and Indian pharma companies.

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Sudarshan Jain (Image: IPA)

India has seen a deadly second wave and several challenges with respect to the shortage of key Covid drugs. What practices should be adopted by the industry and other stakeholders to tackle such issues in future?

Given the increasing demand, the industry has ramped up production capabilities of some key Covid-19 medicines to ensure their availability. The industry along with other stakeholders is tapping into hitherto unutilised capacities and deploying innovative solutions to increase the accessibility of drugs for Covid-19 and beyond. To catalyse better preparedness and fight the new mutants circling across countries, especially in India, national stockpiling of essential Covid-19 drugs and vaccines is necessary. Going forward, as a country we will need not only inventories of Covid-19 medicines but also to look at vaccines similarly.

How important is it to continue maintaining equilibrium for an accessible and affordable supply of medicines while maintaining the highest quality standards?

While dealing with the present pandemic the accessibility of medicine is important. The industry has been maintaining the highest quality standard at all levels of manufacturing and distribution. The industry is focussing on innovative solutions to address the supply chain and distribution challenges. At the IPA, we have a focused IPA quality forum that is operational for the last five years and looks at all quality-related matters. The group has been very active during the pandemic and has been contributing to ensuring the quality of medicines.

With several Indian companies bringing in medicines to build a strong Covid portfolio, how important is the role of collaboration between global and Indian pharma companies?

Collaboration is and will be an important enabler in accelerating the accessibility of medicines, especially the Covid-19 drugs and vaccines. Several Indian companies have partnered with global manufacturers in the endeavour to provide better accessibility of essential drugs. There are plenty of examples such as Remdesivir, Molnupiravir. In vaccines, we have seen the collaboration of AstraZeneca and Serum Institute in India. Further, Dr Reddy's is collaborating with RDIF and Gamaleya centre for marketing and distribution of Sputnik. Across the world, various collaborations are evolving not only among pharma companies but between academicians, companies, and governments.

What steps are Indian companies taking to increase focus on innovation, research and development (R&D) to accelerate future potential?

Advancing research and innovation are top priorities for the industry. To enable an ecosystem of innovation and growth the industry will continue to invest in skill development, infrastructure enhancement to transform the country into a life sciences innovation hub. Regulatory simplification, industry-academia collaboration and funding will be the pillars for innovation.

How do you envisage the big leap of Indian pharma based on your learnings from the second wave of Covid-19?

Covid-19 has unlocked new opportunities for the Indian pharma sector. Investing in innovation, R&D and fostering partnerships will help domestic companies expand their horizon and establish a stronger position in the global pharma industry.

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