

BUSINESS & REGULATION |
Profession, COVID-19

Learning Never Stops

Sitting Down With... Sudarshan Jain, Secretary-General of the Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance (IPA)

Maryam Mahdi | 06/04/2021 | Interview



How did you get started in pharma?

I've worked in the pharmaceutical industry for over 40 years, but my early career path wasn't conventional. I didn't have a background in biological sciences. In fact, I had pursued a bachelor's degree in physics at St. Stephen's College, Delhi, and an MBA soon after. Though I had chosen this academic route, I did have a keen interest in healthcare and pharma. These industries do, after all, make a huge difference to patient lives worldwide. But the reason I happened to join the industry was due to a chance meeting.

I was lucky enough to meet Desh Bandhu Gupta, owner and founder of Lupin

I was lucky enough to meet Desh Bandha Gupta, owner and founder of Lupin Pharmaceuticals, during my business administration degree. He came to my campus to find young professionals interested in helping him develop his ambition of creating one of the world's largest pharma companies for tuberculosis treatments. At the time, I was industry-agnostic – more interested in building an interesting career than pursuing a particular therapeutic area. But my meeting with Gupta was inspirational. He was the type of person who encouraged people to think big and to put patients first. His ideas and conviction were what convinced me to join him. I spent over three years with the company, learning and growing, before moving on to a role at Johnson & Johnson.

Which of your career milestones are the most important to you?

There isn't one particular moment that stands out to me, but there have been many lessons learned. At J&J, I helped to develop their diagnostics business in India before moving on to other companies and therapeutic areas, such as over-the-counter medicines and healthcare products. I've been involved with a lot of product categories over the years and have come to enjoy the challenges and rewards that come with new markets and working alongside professionals from across the globe.

But the most important lesson echoes from all my bosses, "through it all, the patient has to come first." If you understand patient needs, obtain specialized insights, and develop therapies using a patient-centric approach, your company's work will always be in demand. It has also been a pleasure to work alongside individuals committed to developing markets on sound, ethical footing. I've met so many outstanding people who are passionate about making a difference and lead many of India's pharmaceutical companies today. So, those have been the best parts!

How did you get involved with the IPA?

I've always been interested in the IPA's activities. They are a leading association in the country, and its members contribute both to India's domestic and export markets. Its former Secretary-General, D.G. Shah, was a prominent voice in the Indian pharmaceutical community, but after his unfortunate demise, I was invited to assume the role, which I've held for over two years. Since then, I've worked alongside industry and government to help align pharmaceutical strategies within and outside of the country.

What are your goals for the next five years?

What are your goals for the next five years?

India is known as the pharmacy to the world. We supply medicines to 200 countries worldwide and every third tablet sold in the US comes from here. Although we play an important role in the distribution of drug products to the global market, I would like to see an increased focus on drug discovery within our own borders. We should be able to deliver our own chemical entities alongside other drugs to our international partners

and customers. At the IPA, we are working towards creating an ecosystem where India can thrive as an innovation hub. I'm excited to see this come to reality.

But at the same token, we must maintain a diversified supply chain that fosters competitiveness. Though some suppliers may have the capacity to manufacture particular products, if they unexpectedly run into issues, then everyone is affected. Although it is important to manufacture drug products domestically, we owe it to our citizens to ensure that multiple, diverse supply chain submissions are available to meet their needs.

What has the IPA taught you?

At the IPA, our ethos has three focus areas: innovation, quality, and reach. The COVID-19 pandemic has truly highlighted the importance of these values as we work alongside the government to maintain supplies of essential medicines. Despite the challenges that the crisis has and continues to bring, we have consistently met with suppliers and worked with industry leaders to distribute medicines of consistent quality and think of new ways to approach problems, we hadn't faced previously. In my view, the IPA provides an environment where all pharmaceutical stakeholders can work together to push forward a positive healthcare agenda. Each day is a new learning opportunity, whether that be on the intricacies of domestic government policies or the impact of geopolitical situations on our industry. I'm grateful to be a part of such an open-minded community where the value of continued learning is held in high regard.

About the Author

Maryam Mahdi

Associate Editor