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The epidemic has hastened our efforts to achieve self-sufficiency: Samina Hamied

The COVID-19 outbreak has posed several unprecedented challenges, it also gave the pharma industry an opportunity to reevaluate its role and emerge as a reliable supplier of high-quality, affordable medicines.

Shahid Akhter ETHealthWorld Updated: September 01, 2021, 08:41 IST



Shahid Akhter, editor, ETHealthworld, spoke to **Samina Hamied**, Executive Vice Chairperson, Cipla, to know more about the pulse of the [pharma](#) industry during the [Covid-19 pandemic](#).

Taking lessons from the pandemic, how is the industry

moving towards self-sufficiency to improve accessibility of medicines?

The pharmaceutical industry has witnessed tremendous transformation since the 1950s and today we are not only meeting the domestic demand but also exporting to around 200 countries in the world. One of the important lessons learnt during the COVID-19 pandemic is of [self-reliance in APIs](#) to minimise dependency for imports. The Government has aimed to develop India as a [global healthcare hub](#)

through the PLI Scheme for promotion of domestic manufacturing of critical **Key Starting Materials** (KSMs)/ Drug Intermediates and Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs) in India along with Scheme for Promotion of Bulk Drug Parks.

We at Cipla, have invested significantly in manufacturing including development of new drug delivery systems, facilitation of infrastructure supporting API and formulation developments and strengthening of platform technologies. Given the evolving situation and increasing demand for the drugs, the industry has seized the situation and ramped up production capabilities to meet the demand. We are working continuously with the government, various pharma industry associations and other key stakeholders to ensure that patients in India have access to affordable high-quality life-saving medicines.

How did the industry ensure safety of employees during COVID-19 while maintaining an uninterrupted supply of medicines?

In response to the pandemic, pharmaceutical companies deployed a set of comprehensive practices in the form of safety protocol document which aims at ensuring safety of the personnel at the manufacturing units, minimise risk of an outbreak within the facility and ensuring uninterrupted supplies through continued manufacturing operations without compromising personnel safety.

The protocols were also shared with Indian Government authorities including the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR). The stringent safety measures helped in strengthening its implementation on a day to day basis.

How significant is Indian pharma industry's contribution in meeting patient needs across the globe during COVID-19?

The COVID-19 outbreak has posed several unprecedented challenges, it also gave the pharma industry an opportunity to reevaluate its role and emerge as a reliable supplier of high-quality, affordable medicines. The Indian pharma industry has risen to the occasion and has made efforts to ensure that medicines and vaccines reach people during the pandemic. The Indian pharmaceutical industry is the world's third largest drug producer by volume and the country's market manufactures 60 percent of vaccines globally. Indian companies have also proven their expertise in complex and specialty generics and took proactive actions during the pandemic to ensure that manufacturing continued unhindered. Companies also worked to repurpose drugs used to successfully treat similar viruses to treat Covid-19.

What are the measures that have been taken to ramp up manufacturing, production, and distribution of COVID-19 medicines?

We are working closely working with key stakeholders to continuously increase

production capacity and create a robust supply chain to ensure access to Covid-19 treatments. Government along with pharma companies is also working towards launching new Covid-19 treatments. In May, the Indian government approved monoclonal antibodies cocktail, a new Covid-19 treatment for people who are at high risk of developing severe disease. Introduction of advanced and diverse treatment options is important to achieve an appropriate treatment protocol and will also address the demand of medicine based on the severity of the infection.

To accelerate availability and accessibility of Covid-19 treatments, collaboration within the industry is pivotal. The Indian pharma industry is investing in innovation and infrastructural enhancement to address any operational gaps, enabling better management in these uncertain times.

Are we on the right road to Atma Nirbharta? How do see the gap between the vision and ground reality? Suggestions to make it a success story.

While Atma Nirbharta is a long-term goal for the Indian pharma industry, we are taking steps in the right direction to achieve self-reliance in the next decade. For instance, the introduction of the Production linked incentive (PLI) scheme, a phase-wise policy to achieve self-reliance in API production. This will provide a long-needed boost to pharma manufacturing while ensuring an uninterrupted supply of medicines.

The Covid-19 pandemic has certainly accelerated our efforts towards achieving self-reliance. Moreover, we will have to ensure that these efforts also help us in moving up the value chain. It is important to note that innovation will be a key enabler in our journey to attain self-reliance.

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