

AstraZeneca Plc scouts for Indian partner for drug in-licensing

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Mumbai, Oct 2

After its in-licensing deal with Torrent Pharmaceuticals early this year for developing a hypertension drug, the \$21-billion Anglo-Swedish pharma major AstraZeneca Plc is scouting for more in-licensing partners from the country.

AstraZeneca has been under pressure from the Wall Street to maintain a growth rate of 12% even as two of the company's high-profile drug candidates had to be dropped last year and its new drug pipelines thinned down drastically.

"We are in talks with both pharmaceutical and biotech companies in India for entering into in-licensing collaborations for their molecules," said Dr Jitendra Patel, director, Global Discovery Alliances, AstraZeneca. "These collaborations would be in any therapeutic segment. However, we are yet to finalise a partner yet."

Several Indian companies have been researching on new chemical entities (NCEs), which are in different stages of clinical development. These include Orchid (diabetes drug),

Wockhardt (antibiotics), Dr Reddy's (metabolic disorders, cardiovascular), Nicholas Piramal (oncology), and Lupin (migraine, TB, inflammation, psoriasis).

"Investors expect pharmaceutical companies to grow at 12% every year. This growth is not possible with internal research and development alone," said Dr Patel.

The company had come under pressure last year when US regulators rejected its experimental anti-coagulant Exanta, while its lung cancer pill Iressa failed in a key clinical trial. The company has discontinued development of eight NCE up to July this year.

"India has several well-trained scientists, and has been proactive in implementing IPR," said Dr Patel, adding that the country is now on the radar of

international pharma companies for alliances.

AstraZeneca now has in-licensing partnerships with more than 50 companies worldwide, including three of its recent global in-licensing programmes with Abgenics of the US and Cambridge Antibody of the UK for antibodies development, and NPS of the US in the CNS segment.

"Pharmaceutical companies looking at outsourcing are now viewing Asia in two major divides, one comprising China and the South East Asian countries, and the other comprising India, Australia and others. India is considered the major hub in the latter divide, and is seen as a better outsourcing destination than China," said Dorman Followwill, global vice-president, Healthcare Practice, Frost & Sullivan. ♦

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▶ India seen to be proactive in implementing IPR

