

INTERVIEW

Increasing access to medicines via collaboration and digitisation

A Vaidheesh, VP, South Asia and MD, India, GlaxoSmithKline Pharmaceuticals, in an exclusive interaction with **Prathiba Raju** mentions that in 2017 and beyond, the pharmaceutical sector will witness partnerships with governments to increase access to a broad range of innovative medicines, vaccines and foresees a transformational role of digital in the next few years

What will be the most dominant business trends in 2017 in the Indian pharmaceutical industry?

I foresee a trend of collaboration between government and pharma companies to further increase access to medicines and vaccines in the coming years. The evolution of digital technologies will further aid this development. In fact, GSK India is already making big investments on the digital front, to deliver growth while remaining committed to serve patients with futuristic quality standards. Apart from partnerships, digitisation will see a major leap in the sector. Digital disruption is transforming every industry globally. At GSK, we believe that the time has come for the pharma industry to leverage technology to improve real-time flow of information and ride the digital revolution to fast forward the future. With increased Internet penetration in India and more digital-savvy healthcare professionals (HCPs) GSK is leading this transformation with a vision of an integrated solution that will increase the quality of in-clinic interactions. In fact, in a single quarter in 2016, GSK reached over 400,000 HCPs through the digital route. GSK is also investing in communications with the doctors and leveraging



the power of emerging new technologies. We have digitised our entire field force of over 3000 sales reps with iPads for instant detailing and real-time reporting. We have invested in Veeva a CRM tool for our sales force with an integration of all the digital channels such as websites, emails, webinars, tele-detailing so that they can communicate easily with doctors and offer real-time information. This ensures a seamless and transformational customer experience and makes GSK future ready.

Titans of the pharma

industry are adjusting their sails to adapt to an increasingly VUCA world where volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity are the only constants. So, what defines the leadership in a VUCA pharma scenario?

It is not just the pharma industry but the entire world that is in VUCA right now. First and foremost, we need to recognise the fact that we are in a volatile ever-changing environment and one of the key factors that are likely to face more scrutiny in the pharma industry is the increasing role of regulators and policy

makers. For example, in a critical ecosystem of healthcare, industry is made up of 6Ps – Patients, Payers, Providers, Policy makers, Physicians and Play makers. In every country, VUCA is created by any one of them in some form or the other. For example, in India, this whole focus towards accessible and affordable medicine has created volatility. Now talking of volatility, I believe that the government is very much justified in stepping up and trying to find a way to reach healthcare to over 1.2 billion people in this country.

The pharma industry should also play a huge role as one unified voice and discuss with policy makers ways and means to drive the agenda of accessible and affordable medicine. Though the government and private players strategies might differ, a coalition is necessary. Even industry associations such as OPPI (Organisation of Pharmaceutical Producers of India) are working towards the same goal. Moreover, we as sensible business leaders, must recognise our own responsibility of ensuring the affordability and accessibility of medicines. For example, at GSK India, we have made our vaccines and medicines more accessible by voluntarily reducing the prices of our key

products such as pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV) Synflorix vaccines and Seretide, our leading respiratory offering.

We do believe that a large number of people need to get these vaccines and medicines from the private market. If you want to play for the long term then you need to start looking at price volume equations. There are some categories of volatility, I believe that the where you may not have volume headroom and that is where you need to seek government intervention. So, we need to develop an innovative method of engaging with the government on ways and means to subsidise our price decrease otherwise business becomes non-viable. VUCA is all about how we engage with the entire ecosystem proactively.

How have pharma leaders and corporations in the established markets like the US, EU etc. changed their strategies?

From a GSK perspective, we have always been focussed on access to medicines to patients at large. We differentiate IP and pricing. IP has to get protected and pricing is a function of affordability of that particular country.

As far as the US is concerned, we know a new president has been elected. He,

however, has not yet articulated what the healthcare reforms will look like.

Any new vaccines on the pipeline by GSK?

We do have a wide range of vaccines. Last month, we launched Priorix Tetra vaccine, a paediatric vaccine for immunisation of children between one to twelve years of age against measles, mumps, rubella and varicella. Over the next few years, we plan to launch three respiratory products and two vaccines from our global pipeline. We are in the process of looking at launching few India appropriate solutions.

How do you maintain the highest quality and goodwill of GSK products?

GSK remains committed to the highest quality standards in the pharma industry. We are committed to safeguard the patients who use our products, so it is of paramount importance that we have an effective quality management system (QMS). The quality team ensures that we comply with global and local regulations, assure product safety, quality and efficacy, maintain a state of control over our products and processes and support continuous improvement. We have a large team that continuously conducts quality audit for the value chain, not only in manufacturing, but also across our warehouse and distribution. Quality assurance is our backbone.

How will GST Bill impact the pharma sector?

As long as GST is about less than double digit, the pharma industry should be on a neutral basis, but anything above may affect the industry in terms of sustainability depending on the therapy areas. We are sure that concerned policy makers will do what is appropriate. GST will definitely bring efficiencies as it will improve the ease of doing business, removing the

tax components and making warehouse optimisation possible. We should welcome GST with open arms if it means short-term inconveniences.

How important is India for

GSK?
GSK has a rich 90-year legacy of operating in India with over 30 per cent of the global volume of worldwide pharma products manufactured and sold in India. So, we are committed to India

as a company and that is one of the reasons our parent company has agreed to invest in a new greenfield manufacturing project in India. We are investing ₹ 1,000 crore to set up a new manufacturing

facility in Vemgal, Karnataka, which will be completed in 2018. We are also upgrading our existing manufacturing facility in Nashik with an investment of ₹ 500 crore.

prathiba.raju@expressindia.com



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