Suresh Pattathil – Managing Director & GM, AbbVie / President, OPPI



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Suresh Pattathil wears two hats within India's vast pharma ecosystem. Not only is he responsible for managing AbbVie India as its Managing Director and GM, he also advocates for broader pharma interests as president of the Organization of Pharmaceutical Producers of India (OPPI). He speaks about India's goal of fostering innovation and how OPPI engages with the government to promote access and advocate for fair pricing mechanisms. Pattathil also outlines AbbVie's approach to managing its established portfolios locally, focusing on medical education and disease awareness in areas such as glaucoma and diabetic macular oedema.

Could you provide an overview of the various responsibilities you currently hold in India, starting from your role as President of the Organization of Pharmaceutical Producers of India (OPPI)?

I took on my role as the Organization of Pharmaceutical Producers of India’s (OPPI) president about a year and a half ago. This tenure coincides with a crucial juncture for India as it undergoes a transformative phase. Historically, India has been a major pharmaceutical manufacturer, ranking third in terms of volumes and around 14th in value. Our traditional strength lies in manufacturing and formulation development, making us a key contributor to global pharmaceuticals,

manufacturing roughly 60 percent of global vaccines.

The paradigm shift India needs is to transition from being the “pharmacy of the world” to actively engaging in pharmaceutical discoveries. This shift is the central theme of the OPPI meeting and the Innovation Summit held at the end of September. Various countries, such as Korea and China, have successfully made strides in discovering pharmaceuticals and newer targeted therapies. The Indian government now recognizes the importance of fostering innovation and has implemented policies like the scheme for the Promotion of Research and Innovation in the Pharma and MedTech Sector (PRIP), a significant step towards encouraging local innovation.

As an industry representative, our focus areas include intellectual property, critical for both global and Indian pharmaceuticals on their innovation journey. Another pillar is access, addressing not only the needs of the lower-income population, but also the “missing middle,” constituting 40 percent of the population without adequate coverage. We engage with the government to explore solutions to improve access, such as the Ayushman Bharat scheme or a co-pay system, aiming to transition India from a self-pay market to a more universal healthcare model. The third pillar involves ensuring high quality and fostering innovation, playing an enabling role to support the industry’s core strengths. Lastly, we advocate for fair pricing mechanisms, navigating challenges like price control while ensuring the quality for the patient.

In summary, these four pillars form the core of our advocacy efforts with the government and other stakeholders, as we strive to play a supportive and collaborative role in advancing India’s pharmaceutical landscape.

Have recent policy changes and emerging access models influenced how companies view India and what strategic steps are being taken to leverage the country’s potential, considering the diverse demographics and the evolving healthcare landscape?

From my perspective as the president of OPPI, the attractiveness of the Indian market for pharmaceutical companies, both domestic and global, hinges on policy changes and evolving access models. Despite contributing over 50 percent of the world population, that is India and Asia combined, the challenge lies in the diverse economies and the vast demographic differences within countries like India. The key to unlocking the market’s potential lies in enabling access to innovative therapies, drawing inspiration from models seen in countries like China, Taiwan and Korea. If such evolution occurs, it could make India an appealing market due to its sheer population size. Notably, the established business segment continues to grow, addressing non-communicable

diseases like diabetes, hypertension, and glaucoma. For instance, in the case of glaucoma, patient awareness and access to diagnosis and treatment become critical, presenting a substantial opportunity for pharmaceutical companies to meet the unmet needs of patients and improve their journeys as well as the standards of care. The focus for global pharma often extends beyond merely having a product on the market, emphasizing efforts in market shaping, including patient awareness, diagnosis, and treatment.

As the OPPI President, could you elaborate on the specific aspects of the regulatory environment that have evolved and the innovations introduced by the new drug controller?

The regulatory environment in India has undergone significant transformation, characterized by enhanced structure, digitalization, and transparency over the past five years. The new DCGI is playing a pivotal role in bringing about innovations and fostering transparency, as highlighted in discussions such as the OPPI Summit. While acknowledging the progress, there remains a collaborative effort to continually enhance the regulatory landscape.

How does OPPI perceive the landscape for clinical development in India?

As the OPPI President, I believe India presents a significant opportunity for clinical trials, ranking seventh globally in contributing patients to USFDA trials. Quality parameters in Indian clinical trials align with international standards, making it a favourable environment. The existing infrastructure and capabilities in India are robust, comparable to the US and China, evident in audits of clinical trial sites.

The government is actively considering the clinical research landscape, recognizing its potential contribution. According to Clinical Trials Registry India, the current data indicating around USD 1.8 billion in clinical research, is expected to double in the coming years and policymakers are contemplating supportive measures*. The focus is on formulating policies to bolster the clinical development environment, considering the anticipated growth.

You mentioned the unique dynamics of managing an established portfolio in India, considering the vast patient population, how does AbbVie navigate and strategize to

ensure sustained growth in these therapeutic areas?

Managing an established portfolio in India, including areas like diabetes and age-related conditions, is a dynamic process driven by the unique healthcare landscape. Despite being termed “established,” these portfolios are essentially growth portfolios due to the substantial patient population. For instance, with 100 million people in India suffering from diabetes, conditions like diabetic macular oedema become crucial to address.

AbbVie aims to create a sustainable and impactful presence and the company is committed to navigating the complexities of the Indian healthcare landscape, ensuring that its established portfolios not only meet the current demand but also contribute significantly to improving patient outcomes in the long run.

Can you elaborate on how you make the case for substantial investments in these portfolios? What strategies does AbbVie employ to secure support for optimizing investments?

The key lies in presenting a compelling case for optimal investments that go beyond mere coverage and actively contribute to shaping the market. At AbbVie, we focus on patient-centric strategies that extend beyond typical approaches. In glaucoma, we are focused on medical education and disease awareness that emphasizes the importance of regular check-ups to prevent blindness, especially in high-risk groups, such as patients suffering from diabetes and hypertension.

Similarly, in diabetic macular oedema, we concentrate on educating the scientific community about treatment choices, especially the critical role of inflammation. By aligning investments with our patient-centric approach, we ensure that every effort serves the purpose of improving patient outcomes. This approach not only secures approval but also resonates globally as a more impactful and forward-thinking focus on the patient journey.

In your capacity as OPPI President, how do global pharmaceutical companies approach partnerships with competitors and larger Indian players, and what innovative business models or portfolio partnerships are evolving in the primary care segment?

In the pursuit of efficient business models, global pharma explores partnerships with other companies, often larger Indian players, to optimize resources. These collaborations aim to manage established portfolios effectively, allowing global pharma to concentrate on core assets and more innovative priorities. For instance, there have been partnerships around diabetes, where global pharmaceutical companies collaborate with local Indian counterparts to extend the reach of new molecules to a broader network of primary care physicians.

There is a focus on innovative models and partnerships to navigate the complex Indian pharmaceutical market. These collaborations are integral to our strategy, ensuring that established portfolios are managed effectively, freeing up resources for more impactful, differentiated, and innovative ventures that can make a difference in people’s lives

Looking ahead to 2024, what exciting developments can we anticipate from AbbVie in India?

India is a relatively new market for AbbVie, and we are still navigating the regulatory mechanisms and market access models for the region. With Allergan’s history and presence in the region for the past 25 years and our joint venture with Piramal, I believe that we have a strong foundation for growth, especially in the areas of Eye Care and Neurosciences.

Today, more than ever, we are well-positioned with resources and focus to deliver on our commitments and turn possibilities into reality for more patients. This also allows us to advance our innovative science pipeline to help address the needs of people and communities around the world.

In eye care specifically, we are focused on clinically relevant science to make a meaningful difference for patients. We seek to advance innovation and elevate the standard of care, from the front to the back of the eye, with a broad and diverse portfolio and a robust R&D strategy

Are there any key insights you believe are essential for our global audience? What strategies do you recommend for global pharmaceutical companies eyeing the Indian market?

Speaking in my capacity as OPPI President, I believe that first and foremost, it is crucial for the global audience to recognize that the Indian pharmaceutical market is on a trajectory akin to

China’s a decade ago. By 2030, we anticipate the Indian market to reach approximately USD 130 billion, growing consistently at a rate of 8-11 percent annually. The reasons behind this growth are manifold, ranging from a substantial patient base to increasing economic capability and a government increasingly prioritizing healthcare expenditure.

For global pharmaceutical companies eyeing India, my recommendation is to understand the unique dynamics of the market. The key lies in having a mix of local and global leadership. Currently, many global pharmaceutical companies in India are led by Indian expats who bring a deep understanding of the local market while having a global perspective. The synergy of both perspectives is vital. Whether it is an expatriate or a local leader, the ability to think globally and locally is crucial for navigating the complexities of the Indian pharmaceutical landscape. This approach ensures a well-rounded strategy that can leverage both global expertise and local market insights for sustainable growth.

*Cited from: https://ctri.nic.in/Clinicaltrials/login.php

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