

Interview: Riaz Bandali, President ESD, InVentiv Health Clinical, Canada



05.11.2013

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Riaz Bandali, President ESD of InVentiv Health Clinical discusses the ways in which the company's unique combination of different technologies and capabilities will help lead the way to better healthcare and the ability to treat individuals more effectively.

What was your initial mandate at InVentiv?

Like many Canadian health and life sciences companies, including CROs and biotech, the last five years have been a very challenging period. My first job at InVentiv was to help reposition this business for growth & success. As with many companies through the 2008-2013 timeframe, much of that involved restructuring. InVentiv needed to be more streamlined, more effective in serving changing customer needs, more aligned with demand versus supply, and more focused on differentiators to build advantages to reignite growth. This required some tough, but necessary, decisions and actions to position InVentiv more effectively to compete moving forward. Part of that was integrating a small Canadian company into several others to eventually form InVentiv Health Clinical, which is now the fifth largest CRO in the world. InVentiv Health Clinical has 7,000 people globally dispersed within forty countries, which allows for scale, global breadth, innovative capability and a series of convergent offerings that range from Clinical Development services to commercial and consulting services.

How does Canada's stringent regulatory environment play a role in terms of InVentiv's ability to operate here?

I am a strong proponent of regulatory protection and guidance being in place to ensure high quality work that protects clinical trial subjects. One important issue includes ensuring that those same regulations are being applied in emerging countries with historically more lax regulatory oversight. Another important issue is to ensure that new regulatory guidance truly focuses on helping to improve patient safety and does not purely allow for non-value added, supplemental procedures and additional time lags that make Canada a less attractive geography for the conduct of clinical trials. This is what Canada needs to keep a strong watch on. Recently, Canada has made some regulatory changes that put it at a competitive disadvantage to other regions like the US or Europe. This causes a significant strain for companies trying to compete for business versus international competition.

If the government were to create legislation requiring licenses for CROs to conduct clinical trials, how would that affect InVentiv Health Clinical?

I do not think that there is a large CRO base in Canada. There are a few small players and a couple of players that have been consolidated into larger entities, many of which do not offer a large breadth of offerings actually based out of Canada. Most reputable Canadian CROs are accredited and conduct global clinical trials. These CROs get several regulatory inspections each year. InVentiv Health Clinical has had inspections from Health Canada, the FDA, EMEA, ANVISA, among other regulatory bodies and clients, over the last two years, and we are very proud of our regulatory track record.

In what ways will InVentiv Health Clinical's recent rebranding affect the Canadian strategy?

This is a global strategy. InVentiv can help firms develop a therapeutic from Pre-clinical bioanalysis, to Phase I and all the way through to a product realization and approval. The ability to couple clinical development to a product's pre-approval and post-commercialization needs makes InVentiv's offerings unique. InVentiv can bring great expertise for several important tasks including clinical development, strategic resourcing, contract sales, product positioning and branding, product naming, or risk share deals for accelerating market share capture for mature products. We also have a consulting group that works extensively on a strategic level with regard to brand positioning and competitive differentiation.

InVentiv Health Clinical focuses on many therapeutic areas like oncology, infectious diseases, cardiovascular, and neuroscience. Where does the Canadian affiliate place its greatest emphasis?

InVentiv Health Clinical has a global Phase II-IV team. We also have a group that focuses exclusively on providing multi-faceted and very innovative resource solutions for sponsor companies in the industry. We can help customize our solution set to serve a Company's need. We have world-class clinical development capability and experience in Key Therapeutic Areas, such as CNS disorders, pain and oncology. We can bring this global expertise to help any company involved with those areas. We do not focus on one sole area in Canada. We look at how we can help companies with these types of development programs globally, not purely in Canada.

What is the strategic importance of the Canadian affiliate to the entire organization?

Canada has a very important position. From an early stage development perspective, our Phase I offering right now is based in Quebec City. We also have a bio-analytical base there. Both of these offerings are world-class and serve clients worldwide. They also help establish a strong base for the Canadian and Quebec life sciences industries.

How significant are partnerships to Inventiv's overall strategy?

InVentiv Health Clinical has advertising and digital media capability that is very distinct from other providers in the health and life sciences and CRO space. The company is building best-in-class expertise for recruiting patients. One of the biggest challenges with conducting any trial, especially in Phase II and beyond, is recruiting and retaining patients. We are building a series of capabilities and novel partnerships that will help us do that more effectively than any other company in the world. That is our goal with regard to those partnerships that you heard about. The cost of recruiting patients on a clinical trial is 30 percent of the total cost of a trial, and thus the single largest expenditure associated with drug development.

What local partnerships exist in Canada?

InVentiv Health Clinical Canada has local partnerships in place, such as with Hospital Masionneuve Rosemont, and with the McGill University Health Center for patient access. We also look very extensively at partnering with global players that have best-in-class capability, and are able to offer that capability to Canadian customers, as well as the Canadian marketplace.

What makes InVentiv Health Clinical the partner of choice?

I think it is our great people, but it is also the ability to offer convergent services. InVentiv has a unique and extensive array of capabilities and companies that will help you position and manage your brand, complete your clinical development, strategically differentiate your offering, advertise, name and sell your product, monitor and increase compliance and many more services. For example, with a biotech company founded by a Venture Capital firm looking to complete its Phase II trials and then licensing their lead product or selling the company to a big pharma company, we can offer a different model for the company and its investors to consider. This is done by providing virtual capability to get the product to the market without having to bear all of the infrastructure set up costs. If this option increases the return potential for the investor and allows the company to build a sustainable operational base, it becomes a win-win scenario for all parties.

As the fifth biggest CRO globally, where will InVentiv Health Clinical be in five years?

InVentiv should still have a very strong presence in Canada and help to lead in the vibrant rebirth of the health and life sciences sector here. It also, hopefully, will continue to deliver true value and innovation for all of our customers around the world.

Canada is a great country with regard to its basic scientific and academic infrastructure, which cultivates very bright scientific minds. We are a great country to work in. Taking those great minds and challenging them to turn their ideas into a solid and growing base of Canadian health and life sciences companies should be a national goal. I would love to build an environment and capability set to allow this goal to be achieved and to have Canada positioned as a leader in the health and life sciences sector.

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