

Innovation needed to make healthcare affordable

04 September 2012 | News | By Vipul Murarka

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Bangalore: Innovation for inclusiveness and growth of the country should be the next target for the Indian industry and academia. The Eighth India Innovation Summit 2012 started with this note. The two day summit with a theme of "India Innovates For The World" outlined the areas where innovation can drive the growth.

Speaking on this occasion, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Karnataka, Shri Jagadish Shettar, said, "The participation for this event has drawn attention from across the globe. India has transformed from mere adopting technology to promoting innovation. Bangalore and Karnataka is the undisputed IT hub of India. The key benefits of innovation can now be reaped even by the poorer sections of the society. The government has set up state innovation councils and there are a couple of projects in the pipeline for IT and BT sectors in Tier 1 and Tier 2 cities. These projects have attracted stakeholders across sectors who have invested thousands of crores in the upcoming projects."

"We have implemented many new policies across sectors. We will continue to work with CII for the development of the state. I would like to congratulate CII for successfully organizing the summit for seven years and we would continue to support this summit and wish it a grand success. Our government has constituted State Innovation Council on the lines of National Innovation Council. Our government has taken IT and BT parks to tier II cities. Our government is working with CII on clean energy and many other issues with the sole aim of improving the lives of the people," he added

The two day conference, held in Bangalore, saw interesting sessions in many areas such as grand challenges in India, transportation, affordable healthcare, efficient energy and a few others.

The session on the second day of the event, on affordable and inclusive healthcare saw renowned personalities from the industry such as Mr Vishal Bali, group CEO, Fortis Healthcare, who chaired the session. The session included eminent speakers such as Dr Krishna Murthy Ella, chairman and MD, Bharat Biotech International; Mr T K Padmanabha, chief technology officer, Wipro Infotech and Dr Rangesh Paramesh, head, drug discovery (R&D center), The Himalaya Drug Company.

Dr Bali before inviting the speakers spoke a bit about healthcare and highlighted that India is certainly a favourable destination for healthcare. He mentioned that, "Since about only one percent of the GDP of our country goes into healthcare, innovation in this sector has certainly become a need. We often talk about solutions copying from the west. We have a strong belief that India has solution for affordable healthcare."

Dr Ella started the session with a bit of humor expressing the state of healthcare in our country. He highlighted that drugs in India are cheaper; 50 percent cheaper than in China. He also mentioned that Indian pharma companies copy better than others and that consumer perception in India is that higher the price of the drug or vaccine, better the quality.

India at the moment ranks 46 in the innovation index rating. "We need both political and scientific commitment to excel in this sector," added Dr Ella during his presentation. Then he talked about innovation that is happening at Bharat Biotech and how the vaccine giant has been able to bring down the cost of hepatitis B vaccine from Rs800-to-Rs10 per dose. He also highlighted that in India, academia has never developed a new molecule and even the industry has not yet launched a new molecule in India.

He said, "Our system is ready to invest Rs5,000 crore budget to National disaster management authority to treat the patients who are suffering from Japanese Encephalitis but not to prevent it." He then mentioned that Bharat Biotech has developed a new molecule BBIL-5 which has been developed in house and should cost Rs3,000, where as the similar molecule from the west costs Rs30,000. The molecule is supposed to hit the market in two months and is supposed to be the first new molecule from India.

Next presentation was Mr T K Padmanabha, CTO, Wipro. It was interesting for everyone in the room to know that a company which has strong history in the IT industry is also investing in healthcare domain. He mentioned that there are four areas where Wipro is concentrating, including hyper spectral imaging, remote computing platform, remote EHS monitoring and wireless safety network. He began with highlighting the healthcare needs in India. For instance there are about 25 million people suffering from CVD, 40 million from asthma and 50 million from diabetes. Hence, it has become important to address these in India.

One of the products for remote care from Wipro is mHealth Architecture. It involves a device to monitor ECG but the device is as small and portable as a mobile phone. Another platform is to address chronic illness in the field of Next Gen Cardiac Monitoring. Mr Padmanabha mentioned that it took six engineers, four months to come up a solution for this disease and the entire project didn't cost more than Rs50 Lakhs.

Wipro is also coming up with solution in the area of next generation pregnancy monitoring where the company has partnered with a UK-based start-up that has made a handheld device to monitor fetus and mother during pregnancy and at the time of labour. The device can measure the heartbeat of the child as well as note the uterine contraction rate. This enabled with the cloud can be used in remote areas where gynaecologists might not be available but they can get the data of the woman in labour and child on his tablet or mobile and recommend accordingly.

The last presentation at the session was by Dr Rangesh Parmesh from Himalaya, who highlighted the purpose and importance of Ayurveda. After giving a comprehensive introduction about Ayurveda, he showcased certain Himalaya's products which are making an impact in the healthcare segment.

During the questions and answers at the end, each panellists highlighted a challenge in this sector. While Dr Ella mentioned that the regulatory system needs to be robust, Mr padmanabha said that the semiconductor technology can play a major role in healthcare when it comes to innovation and so there is a need to mass scale the products based out of these semiconductor chips to provide cost effective healthcare. Dr Rangesh mentioned that there is a need for quality education in the country. Dr Bali concluded the session by saying that "the baseline is that innovation is needed and that innovation need not be expensive. The products need to be made in India, for India and for the emerging world."