

PATIENT FIRST

The Big Pharma Dose

Industry stalwarts discuss the way forward—in terms of creating a quality culture, solving supply chain issues and bringing innovation—at a summit by the Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance



The Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance (IPA) hosted its ninth edition of the Global Pharmaceutical Quality Summit in Mumbai in July.

The two-day event brought together industry leaders, regulators, quality experts and other stakeholders to

discuss the ‘Advances in Manufacturing and Quality–Patient Centricity’.

A panel discussion on ‘Blueprinting for the future: Charting out the next decade of pharma quality and operations’ included Dilip Shanghvi, managing director, Sun

Pharmaceutical Industries; GV Prasad, co-chairman and managing director, Dr Reddy’s Laboratories; Pankaj Patel, chairman, Zydus Lifesciences; Nilesh Gupta, managing director, Lupin; and Umang Vohra, managing director and global CEO, Cipla. Edited excerpts:

What is good for society is good for business: Dilip Shanghvi

ON EMPOWERING PEOPLE

While we focus on designing our products well, and having robust manufacturing processes, we also need to recognise that we have thousands of people working in our manufacturing infrastructure. So, we need to build a robust culture of empowering them, strengthening their ability to share their views and observations. Historically, we’ve been a top-down society, and that will need a change if we have to succeed in strengthening our culture. I see most of the Indian companies are on that journey. And in the process, technology is also changing, and upgrading.

ON SUPPLY CHAIN CHALLENGES

As you face business challenges, you come up with solutions, which can potentially reduce your future challenges. And thanks to the Production-Linked Incentive Scheme, we are likely to get many key starting materials from within the country.



But what the automobile industry has done in terms of strengthening their supply chain, capability-building and use of technology is incredible. We need to think in this direction... how we can help our vendors upgrade their capability, so that they can go through future inspections successfully, without any disruption.

ON ESG

A big change in the past few years is that investors are looking at companies’ performance on ESG. This is a positive change because

you’re driven by what helps you generate more value. For instance, the environmental impact of the production processes. One way to think about it is, how do you reduce the environmental impact by improving efficiency? I think, ultimately, this will help us improve our carbon footprint and help society. And the company’s financials. It will also make the manufacturing processes safer, and help us become a much more diversified business. So, on all accounts, what is good for society is also good for business.

ON THE PHARMA INDUSTRY

As an industry and as individuals, we’ve been reticent about what we are contributing to global health. I’m happy that we don’t operate from a position that we know everything and everything that we do is always right. As an industry, we recognise that there are issues, and we have worked on addressing them. As we go higher, we have to keep adding to what we know. Learning new things does not expose our weaknesses, it only exposes our strength.

On the innovation front, I believe that Indian companies will make a difference in the next 10 years. That will create a cascade of investment in the future.



Technology is a force multiplier: GV Prasad

pressure of improvement on reaching higher standards of quality.

ON GENERATIVE AI

We need to look at generative AI (artificial intelligence) as a technology, which is still in its infancy. It is not as evolved as it should be. Second, technology is an enabler. You have to have the fundamentals right, a good understanding of your process, good talent and then if you overlay technology, it will help you.

The tech evolution in our industry is quite primitive due to many reasons. It is a heavily regulated industry, and people are fearful of changing things. Having said that, it should not act as a deterrent to adoption of technology.

We [Dr Reddy's] have made huge amounts of investments in terms of technology. We have put all the fundamental basics in place, and we're starting to see benefits in terms of not letting humans do the chore of repetitive work. There has been an improvement in the quality of data, investigation etc.

Technology is a force multiplier. You cannot afford to not adopt technology. In terms of productivity, some of our plants, such as the injectables plant, have seen 3x productivity through automation and mechanisation. The vision is to develop processes that you can run in a plant with the lights out, that is with no human intervention. It will take us a few years to get there, but I think we're on it.

ON INDIAN PHARMA'S SUCCESS

I think we don't celebrate the success of our industry enough. Outside the IT sector, this is the most impactful sector on the world stage. There are many things that the industry should be very proud of. We've supplied the world with many medicines, which have become much more affordable and accessible because of India.

We can't imagine the world today without Indian medicines. We are a leading force in APIs and in generics. Also, in the services area, we are emerging to become very strong, both in discovery services and manufacturing and innovation.

ON EMBRACING QUALITY

We talk about regulatory compliance, regulation, inspections, but that's not what quality is about. Quality is about the patient's safety, the efficacy and purity of the product. It should be something of an absolute. If a small dosage can cure you, a small impurity can also harm you. So it's necessary to embrace patient centricity in quality, and design your systems around that.

Many other industries have taken quality to an entirely different level—6 sigma level, 8 sigma level. But our industry is still not there; I'm told we're somewhere around 4 sigma level. This is a journey that is not going to end. You have to put positive

The future is innovation: Pankaj Patel



ON TECH AND QUALITY

We cannot settle for anything mediocre. And using technology as an enabler for improving quality standards is going to be important.

ON SKILL DEVELOPMENT

We need to work closely with universities to make sure that freshers are trained properly, and industry ready. We need to use digital learning tools as well as practical learning to make sure they are trained properly. More importantly, the learning process should never stop.

ON FUTURE TRENDS

Manufacturing has evolved immensely over the last 10 years. But

the future is innovation. I believe that it is going to take the industry to the next level. Our company has two innovative products that are approved in India. The first has completed Phase II and III recruitment in the US. Hopefully, it will also have a USFDA approval one day.

Second, biosimilars are the future. This is where the Indian pharmaceutical industry is growing very fast. We can proudly say that we have the only ADC drug—antibody-drug-conjugates combine chemotherapy and targeted therapy to treat certain blood cancers and cancerous tumours—in the world, which is a biosimilar and produced in India.



SHUTTERSTOCK

We have to be the best in class: Nilesh Gupta

ON MOVING UP THE LADDER

We earned the title of 'pharmacy for the world'. It wasn't given to us on a platter, it was built with hard work, dedication and on the foundation of science. We should do everything we can to protect it.

We've built a great position for generics, and we're doing the same for complex generics now, both individually and as an industry. And this is not just an arbitrage opportunity, where pharma firms are looking to make in India since it's cheaper. As an industry we have moved up the innovation ladder. The next step obviously is to go even deeper on the innovation front.

ON VISION FOR QUALITY

We keep talking about moving in the right direction. But at some point, we have to just get there. We have to be the best in class. There is this layer of governance that is needed on the entire supply chain, and that goes beyond just managing your own

shop. Keeping patients at the centre of it, sustainable quality control is necessary.

ON TRANSPARENCY

The supply chain will need to have a lot of transparency. If somebody picks up a bottle in the US or Europe that is made in India, they should know where it came from, what batch it was made from and details of when the product was made.

The complexity from a supply chain perspective that we deal with is a lot more than what Pfizer or Abbott or any of the big pharma companies do. We are constantly trying to de-risk and simplify, but it is complex. In this, technology can help us immensely.

As we move up the innovation curve, there are new regulations that are being applied to existing suppliers also. This means, we also have to solve that as we bring more products to the market. This is the world we live in, and we love this degree of complexity.



Generative AI is an enabler: Umang Vohra

ON THE FOUR PILLARS

If you total the number of lives this industry will touch or improve, that's a phenomenal thing. If I were to just look back on the journey we've been on—the first is the people aspect. That journey takes a long time, depending on where each company is at. The second is product—the design of your product at the beginning begins to impact your quality outcomes as you go forward. The third is the manufacturing plant, which is related to the fourth, which is technology. In the equipment that is used in plants, technology upgrades are very important. So when it comes to quality, all these four pillars play a key part.

ON GENERATIVE AI

The moment you get hold of anything with generative AI, the tendency is to think that it will give you a significant competitive insight. So you begin to look at the system as one that gives you something that others don't know. But you don't realise that the first aspect of getting there is stabilising the data and inputs.

Next is the mindset that needs to change. If you sell generative AI as something that is going to replace somebody's job or make it more efficient, it doesn't necessarily work. You have to sell it as an enabler, and as something that will coexist with the workforce.

• NAINI THAKER



FROM TOP: JOSHUA NAVAL KAR