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SeerPharma explores markets in India, China

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Australia-based SeerPharma, which offers international quality management and compliance experience, and advice to support client's compliance management and productivity improvement across pharmaceutical, medical devices and biological industries, is planning its foray into India and China. Formed in 2001 with its headquarters in Melbourne, the company has a regional office in Singapore and strategic alliances in the UK and South Korea. It is now talking to companies in India and China to capitalize on the growth of the life sciences industry in these two countries.

Mr Brad Roberts, partner and senior consultant, SeerPharma, speaks to *BioSpectrum* about their plan to enter the India market during his visit as part of Victoria Government Super Trade Mission to India.

Are you planning to expand your business in India? If yes, then how do you plan to enter?

Mr Roberts: The purpose of SeerPharma's involvement in the trade mission was two-fold. Firstly, it was establishing whether there was a market for us in India. Secondly, assuming an opportunity existed, exploring the options available to take advantage of in this market.

SeerPharma sees several opportunities in India. During discussions with several companies as part of the trade mission, interest was expressed by them for using SeerPharma's expertise in GXP (GMP, GLP, GCP and GDP, etc.) and compliance consulting services to expand their existing offering, both horizontally and vertically, in the market. Similar interest was shown in our integrated quality assurance (iQA) and quality management system (QMS) products, and they are being pursued.

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By far the biggest opportunity for SeerPharma in India's life sciences industry seems to be in the training sector. A significant amount of interest in the various training programs offered by SeerPharma in compliance and GXP, including validation, risk management and annual product reviews, was shown by individual companies, educational institutions and industry associations. We are hopeful that further discussions will enable SeerPharma to develop a relationship that will allow us to

develop and deliver programs across the life sciences sector in India.

What are your views on the life sciences industry in India?

Mr Roberts: The life sciences industry in India, in particular pharmaceuticals, is predicted to grow significantly over the next three years and expected to be ranked the eighth largest market in the world by 2015. This is a significant increase from a ranking of 15th in 2005. This growth, along with more than 20,000 manufacturers, offers a significant opportunity for SeerPharma to provide good manufacturing practices (GMP) training and compliance services to this expanding market.

Although SeerPharma has had some experience in India in the past, the involvement has been very little and mainly under the banner of the World Health Organization (WHO). The Victoria government's trade mission to India this year provided an ideal opportunity for SeerPharma to investigate market opportunities and understand some of the business dynamics in the country.

How will you approach to enter the Indian market?

Mr Roberts: We see the next step in this process as talking to parties interested in what SeerPharma has to offer and consider the best win-win business relationship for SeerPharma and the potential associates. The business model and the subsequent funding arrangements will very much rely on the outcome of any discussions that we may have.

India is already a leader in the pharmaceutical market and companies follow guidelines set by regulatory authorities. Isn't it too late to enter the India market now?

Mr Roberts: There is no doubt that the life sciences industry in India has improved its compliance to international standards significantly over the past few years. However, the regulators around the world are continuously "raising the bar", demanding ever-increasing standards of compliance. As a result, I think there is always going to be opportunity in providing compliance advice. However, there are already many consulting groups in India providing compliance advice. But there may be an opportunity for a group such as SeerPharma, which has extensive international experience in helping organizations maintain the highest level of global compliance standards at the right cost, in providing high-end advice to the industry in India. We also believe there is place for our quality management system software (iQA) since it provides users with an easily configurable system developed specifically for the life sciences industries.

We are talking to people with respect to some sort of arrangement to get iQA into the India market. However, we believe the greatest opportunity for SeerPharma in India is in GMP compliance training. My trip, as part of the Victoria Government Trade Mission, confirmed to me that there is a need and a market for a well-established and proven Masters in GMP qualification, such as the program we offer in conjunction with Swineburne University, enterprise specific GMP programs and our eLearning products. We will be pursuing interested partners to work with them in developing and delivering these programs to the life sciences industry in India.

China is another big market when it comes to the life sciences industry. Are you looking at entering the Chinese market?

Mr Roberts: You are correct. China is a huge market with many opportunities. SeerPharma is in discussions with some groups in China and looking at the pluses and minuses of establishing our training programs there. We believe there are similar opportunities there as in India. The difficulty in China as compared to India is, of course, the language. We see India as a better short-term opportunity because we can essentially take our existing offerings into India with very little reworking.

What are the future plans of the company?

Mr Roberts: SeerPharma intends to build on its reputation as Asia Pacific's premier quality assurance and compliance consultancy. To maintain this reputation, we need to increase our presence in emerging life sciences markets, particularly in India, China and South Korea. It is our intention to capitalize on the expansion of the life sciences industry in these markets. Our future focus will be on developing relationships with partners in each of these markets.