

Dr Gautam Daftary: The Indian biologics pioneer

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Indian company Bharat Serums and Vaccines boasts of a product portfolio that includes many firsts in India and the world and has carved out a prominent space in the world of biologicals and recombinants. Currently, it has more than three innovative products in advanced stages of clinical development.

Spearheading its research initiatives for more than two-and-a-half decades is Dr Gautam Daftary, managing director, Bharat Serums and Vaccines. A medical doctor by training, Dr Daftary says he never intended to practice medicine. Instead, after completing his studies, he underwent trainings to familiarize himself with the techniques in protein chemistry for the development of blood products, which were the earliest offerings of the company.

At Bharat Serums and Vaccines, a company established by his father, Dr Daftary has focused on the R&D aspects. His brother Mr Bharat Daftary takes care of the business aspects of the family-owned company.

Under Dr Daftary's leadership, the Mumbai-headquartered company has been granted more than 15 patents in India and abroad. Several more patent applications are currently pending approval. One-of-the innovate products launched by the company is Ulinastatin, a biosimilar for the treatment of sepsis. Another product in advanced stages is the Amphotericin B emulsion, a first-of-its-kind in the world. The molecule has recently completed phase III clinical trials for the treatment of kala azar. As compared to the innovator molecule of Amphotericin B, which has to be administered in over four doses, Bharat Serum's formulation can be given in a single dose of 15 mg.

Dr Daftary's team, which carries out research from three locations, including India, Dusseldorf in Germany and San Jose in the US, focuses on developing niche products and the challenges of unmet clinical needs. "The challenges have driven us to break technology barriers. If they say we can't do it, it makes us want to do it even more," he says. "I liked the challenge that was presented to us for pursuing R&D in things other than blood products. We worked on it and learned (new things), as we went ahead and successfully marketed Propofol, a lipid emulsion anesthetic, in 1997. It was a first in India where the technology was developed completely in house."

Dr Daftary is also credited with starting a contract research organization (CRO) in 1995. Arguably the first such organization in the country, Siro Clinpharma started out as a unit of Bharat Serums and Vaccines and became an independent entity later.

It has now grown to be one of the largest Indian CROs, with Dr Daftary as its chairman.

Moving ahead, he plans to develop recombinant versions of the products to address the cost factor associated with the use of natural materials.