

## Probi ties up with USV to tap India market

03 July 2012 | Influencers | By BioSpectrum Bureau

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Swedish Biotechnology research company Probi, which develops probiotics with well-documented beneficial health effects, recently signed a distribution agreement with USV India, a leading Indian pharmaceutical company. Under the agreement, USV will launch Vibact IBS, based on the probiotic formulation Probi Digestis, in India in the fourth quarter of 2012. The agreement further reinforces and strengthens Probi's presence in the growing India market.

Mr Michael Oredsson, CEO, Probi, and Mr R Sukumar, senior vice president, USV, talk to BioSpectrum about the plans for Vibact IBS in India.

**Tell us about the product Vibact IBS that you are planning to launch in India.**

**Mr Oredsson:** Vibact IBS is based on Probi's probiotic formula ProbiDigestis containing the clinically documented probiotic strain *Lactobacillus Plantarum* 299v. The product is based on more than 20 years of research by Swedish and international scientists and the product is currently sold in around 30 countries. In double blind, placebo controlled clinical trials, the ProbiDigestis formula has proven to have significant effect on IBS-related symptoms, such as abdominal pain, bloating, flatulence and gas formation. In most countries, 20 percent of the population or more suffer from irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and IBS-related symptoms, and there are very few effective products for IBS sufferers on the market.

**What is the difference between the original Vibact and the new version (Vibact IBS), which is based on Probi Digestis?**

**Mr Sukumar:** Brand Vibact that is currently available in the market consists of *Bacillus mesentericus*, *Clostridium butyricum*, *Streptococcus faecalis* and *Lactobacillus sporogenes*. It is prescribed for diarrhea. It yields short chain fatty acids, such as butyric acid and acetic acid, with a resultant decrease in intestinal pH and inhibition of growth of harmful bacteria. The short chain fatty acids, in addition, help to regularize abnormal bowel movements. The short chain fatty acids also help in adjustment of water and electrolyte concentration of the intestinal tract.

Vibact IBS will contain *Lactobacillus plantarum* 299v, which specifically treats symptoms associated with irritable bowel syndrome, such as abdominal pain, bloating, flatulence and constipation. The bloating and pain experienced by an IBS-patient is due to abnormal colonic fermentation giving rise to an excess of gas production. Lp299v decreases concentration of these gas-producing microorganisms in the GI tract and also inhibits the inflammatory response caused by them in the gut lining. It improves gut transit. Lp 299v is known to stimulate mucin secretion, which hinders the growth of disease-promoting bacteria. Hence, Vibact is used for reducing stool frequency and shortening duration of diarrhoea, whereas Vibact IBS will be used for treating symptoms associated with IBS.

**What is the reason behind launching the product in India? Are you planning to release the product in other Asian countries as well?**

**Mr Oredsson:** I believe Asia will be our most important region in terms of growth in consumer healthcare over the next five years, and India is one of the major markets in Asia.

The Vibact IBS/Probi probiotic has a broad target population in every country, people suffering from temporary or chronic gastrointestinal problems, such as abdominal pain, bloating and gas formation. Probi's product has a unique and clinically proven effect on these problems, whether they are diagnosed as IBS or are milder or more temporary. We know that there is a large market for this product in India, and the most recent clinical study on the product was conducted in India with great results.

**How will you promote Vibact IBS in India?**

**Mr Sukumar:** Our understanding of the market situation is that irritable bowel syndrome has not been well understood, as a consequence of which various symptoms, such as bloating, abdominal pain, flatulence, constipation, are treated separately. It will be our endeavor to bring about awareness amongst doctors to identify patients presenting themselves with various symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome and give them a treatment that addresses this set of symptoms in its entirety. We will create awareness amongst doctors about benefits that will accrue to their patients with IBS, by use of *Lactobacillus plantarum* 299v in preference to other products. This will enable us to establish Vibact-IBS as a key treatment option for doctors.

**Share with us the main highlights of the agreement with USV India.**

**Mr Oredsson:** USV has a lot of experience in the probiotic field and already offers the market-leading probiotic prescription brand Vibact in India. Vibact IBS will strengthen the USV portfolio, specifically targeting IBS and IBS-related symptoms. When combining USV's strong market knowledge and field force with Probi's effective product and scientific knowledge, we build the base for a strong partnership. Probi and USV will work together to secure a successful launch.

**What is the market size of probiotic-based product in India? What will the price of the product in India?**

**Mr Sukumar:** Total Probiotic-based products market is estimated to be \$60 mn and Vibact is a \$4.6 million (Rs 26 crore) brand, showing a growth of 21 percent (source: AIOCD Feb MAT 2012). We plan to introduce Vibact IBS by the end of this year. The pricing of the product is still under consideration and will be finalized in due course.

**What are the expectations of USV with Vibact IBS in terms of market capture and acceptability?**

**Mr Sukumar:** Brand Vibact of USV is one of the leading probiotics in the India market. We will further entrench our position in the probiotic market by promoting Vibact-IBS as the product of choice for treatment of IBS symptoms. Our aim is to rapidly penetrate the market and garner prescriptions for Vibact-IBS and make it the leading product in this category.

**What made you choose USV over your previous distributors such as Aristo Pharmaceutical or Ranbaxy?**

**Mr Oredsson:** USV is a very strong probiotics company in India through their Vibact brand, and they have seen the potential in our product and believe in it. The distribution agreements in India with Aristo Pharmaceutical and Ranbaxy were entered into through Probi's international partner Institut Rosell and they will continue to remain in force.

**What is the uniqueness of Vibact IBS that makes it different from its competitors?**

Currently available Probiotic brands, which are a mix of various strains, are prescribed for several indications, including the irritable bowel syndrome. However, there is not much clinical back-up for these products for treatment of IBS. Vibact-IBS will stand apart from its competition as it is based on a single strain *Lactobacillus plantarum* 299v, which specifically targets symptoms of the irritable bowel syndrome. It has substantial clinical back-up for this particular indication and is effective in

treating various IBS symptoms, such as pain, flatulence, bloating and constipation.