

**Headlines** Advinus to double drug discovery projects; plans foray into formulation devt

**Date** September 15 2010

**Media Resource** PharmaBiz

### **Description**

Advinus Therapeutics, the pharma research and development wing of the Tata Group, has earmarked investment ranging between Rs.200 crore and Rs.300 crore to fuel its expansion plans of its facilities at Pune and Bangalore besides looking at another Greenfield option. The company would tap the private equity investors from within the Group to fund the expansion programme. Also the company is looking to garner growth through inorganic route that is likely to be pursued after fiscal 2010.

As part of the expansion, the company plans to augment capacity of its Pune centre both in terms of infrastructure and human resources. Pune facility which specializes in drug discovery will see expansion in scientific teams so as to support the objective of more than doubling the discovery research projects from the current 6 to 13. The research programmes will not only include the existing studies on metabolic disorders and inflammatory diseases, but address needs of drug development for the ageing population to tackle Parkinson's, Alzheimer's and brittle bones, rheumatoid arthritis and multiple modalities affecting the increasing geriatrics.

In Bangalore, it will set-up a formulation development centre which will be its new area of attention and expand its toxicology facility. "Since we already have a comprehensive research and development capability, our foray into formulation development is only obvious", Dr Rashmi Barbhैया, MD & CEO, Advinus Therapeutics told Pharmabiz in an interaction.

Also, he said, "We intend to run more number of discovery projects to enable us move up the research ladder and chart the additional revenue streams. The company is expected to touch Rs.100 crore by end of fiscal 2010".

The expansion also entails increasing the headcount by 250 people by the year end from the current 125 at Pune for safety assessment, DMPK and process chemistry, within the next 18 to 24 months. In Bangalore, the staff strength will go up from 350 to 400 for toxicology and business development, he added.

Elaborating on the discovery projects, he said, "we are presently in the midst of a rich pipeline of clinical outcomes following our aggressive research efforts. From the recent novel molecule for the treatment of type II diabetes, GKM -001 which completed phase I single ascending dose study to drugs for Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) and inflammatory bowel diseases (IBD), which are under clinical phase. In order to hasten the clinical outcomes, the company is also pursuing two partnerships".

"In the case of GKM-001, we are looking at extending the phase I trials to include patients for which clearance is pending with the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI). The study on healthy volunteers provided positive outcomes of the novel molecule, and the repeat phase 1 trial on actual patients would help us assess the relationship between the actual dose monitoring and glucose lowering capability. It will also help to expedite phase II and help Advinus to pursue an out-licensing deal. "In some area of research we are not equipped to carry out the study and we are looking for partnerships to take the efforts forward even in the case of GKM. Once we complete the phase II study we will need to offload and we believe we will have more than one interested party for the same," stated Dr Barbhैया.

The alliance with the Geneva-based Drugs for Neglected Diseases initiative (DNDi) for discovery and development of therapies for visceral leishmaniasis, commonly known in India as kala-azar has shown positive outcomes.

It is also looking at potential acquisitions companies with a similar fit in formulation development and early drug discovery to create proprietary platforms. "These are business driven decisions that are going to drive our growth aspirations," he said.

