

## Tata Trusts support OSPF — the 'Linux for drugs'

PT JYOTHI DATTA

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"It may be an idea too hot to handle for some groups wedded to IP," says Jaykumar Menon, explaining the creation of the Open Source Pharma Foundation.

Taking a "disruptive" approach to public health, the OSPF seeks to be a "Linux (platform) for drugs".

The Foundation will make data open and public at all stages of the drug development cycle, from early research leads during discovery, through to clinical trials on humans and the final generic manu-

facturing, Menon told *BusinessLine*, speaking from the US. The idea is to bring out innovative and affordable medicines.

The OSPF has received a commitment of \$3 million (about ₹20 crore) from the Tata Trusts, over three years, towards creation of the Foundation, says Menon, who teaches at Canada's McGill University.

Any form of research, especially drug development involves high stakes in terms of protection of the research data or intellectual property (IP). Companies even command

high prices on their innovative medicines as a tool to get a return on this investment in research.

In a stark contrast, Linux is a computer operating system that was built on an open source and free approach towards development and distribution.

OSPF will have its first global office in India (Bengaluru) by December, says Menon. The preliminary funding came from the Rockefeller Foundation to organise the first Annual Global Open Source Pharma conference last year. The support to set up the entity came at the second

conference held earlier this month in Germany.

The initiative borrows from the Linux model, where it is end-to-end open source, and publically funded. So data is made public at every stage for academics, non-governmental organisations, communities or drug companies to get involved and work on a research lead. In its "purest form" there will be no IP, says Menon, and no revenue model built into it.

The approach would be crowd-sourced, computer-driven drug discovery, IT-enabled clinical trials

with open data; and generics manufacturing, he explained.

The OSPF would look at tropical and neglected diseases including tuberculosis, besides research on antibiotics.

The OSPF partners with the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research's Open Source Drug Discovery project (OSDD). In that sense, the Indian government is involved, says Menon. But OSPF "amplifies and internationalises" the OSDD (with its own network of researchers), while operating outside the Government, he explains.

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