

'We're not always at loggerheads with innovator companies'

Mumbai-headquartered Cipla Global, known for its patent challenges worldwide to bring low-priced generics to the table, is opting for a change in strategy. It is joining hands with Gilead, a multinational corporation, to sell generic versions of innovator drugs in various countries. **DENIS BROUN**, its global director for access and public affairs, explains why to Sushmi Dey. Edited excerpts:

Q&A

DENIS BROUN
Global Director for Access and Public Affairs, Cipla Global

How important is the deal with Gilead? How does it fit into the scheme of things for Cipla?

There are 180 million people with Hepatitis-C. The agreement we have signed with Gilead covers 100 million of these. Meaning, all these people will be able to access this product, far better than the existing ones. At present, the only treatment people receive, pegylated interferon which has to be taken as one shot every week, has pretty bad side-effects. Many people stop treatment because of this. The pill from Gilead is once a day, with much shorter treatment and very few side-effects.

Where would Cipla sell the products?

The agreement is going to cover 91 countries. We are present in a lot of these. Some are small, like independent small islands. I do not think the population suffering from hepatitis in such countries is dramatic. But some like India are very important for us. Cipla's network will allow people to access this treatment.

Is Cipla planning to sell the products in all markets? Are you looking to enter new markets with this drug?

Too early to say. Cipla sells in 150 countries and many of them are in this list of 91. We are initially targeting 20-25 markets. This will include those where we are very active with treatment of HIV, those where we have very strong presence like India and South Africa, and those with the largest burden of



Hepatitis-C. We will then expand progressively.

Cipla is seen so far as a revolutionary company, one that has chosen to challenge key patents and provide drugs at much lower prices in developing countries. Is this deal with Gilead a turning point for Cipla?

There has been a big difference between what we have done with other drugs and this one. We now have a patent system for pharmaceuticals and can no longer make generics just like that, as we used to when there were no product patents. To some

extent, there is a change in the approach. We think partnering with an innovator company, which is able to bring new products, is a way which Cipla can develop. We are not always in a loggerhead relationship with companies that try and bring innovation for the benefit of people. We are trying to share this innovation in a way that allows access to the core.

But, so far, Gilead does not have any patent on the two drugs in India and many other countries. Instead, there are pre-grant oppositions which might have earned companies like Cipla a better deal.

It is true that there are no patents granted to Gilead for these drugs so far in India and there is a pre-grant opposition. But we don't know how long that is going to take until there is a decision. It has been a choice. If ever the patent becomes invalid in India, the agreement provides for changes and it will be much easier for us to commercialise it.

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