

'New career avenues are being created in the pharmaceutical industry'



The pharmaceutical industry is more than just about manufacturing pills. It is a knowledge-driven industry, shifting gears as it addresses new challenges. Manish Gupta, CEO, Indegene Lifesystems elaborates on the news skill sets required by pharma professionals to face up to these challenges.

What are the top three challenges facing the global pharmaceutical industry? costs and drive accountability to all critical stakeholders?

With a large number of drugs nearing patent expiry and pipelines getting weaker with fewer blockbuster molecules, major pharmaceutical companies will lose about 15 per cent to 40 per cent of their revenues. It is expected that around \$ 81.5 billion worth of branded products will go off-patent by 2015. This impending patent cliff is translating to an even higher pressure on pharma companies to reduce costs in developed markets in the next couple of years.

The other significant trend is the importance of emerging markets, which is growing in size due to demographics and rising income levels. The rules of the game in emerging markets are different from developed markets, and global pharma companies are trying to suitably align their strategies and organisations.

Finally, there is increasing pressure from regulators and payors. The focus is no longer only on safety but also on patient outcomes. This pressure will increase further as developed countries try to bring down their health care costs and drive accountability to all critical stakeholders.

How is the pharma industry responding to each of these?

As far as cost pressures are concerned, the pharma industry is very aggressively rationalising cost structures across board. Layoffs, reorganisations, shutting down of facilities, outsourcing/offshoring, and new commercial models are among the many changes being implemented. We believe that offshoring and new commercial models will gain significant traction in the next few years.

The growth rates for most of the major pharma companies in emerging markets are significantly higher than those in developed markets where pharma companies execute several different and interesting strategies and initiatives that include launch of new patented products/generics, tighter integration with global headquarters, and more empowerment to regional market teams.

We also see companies setting up teams and strategies to work with and add value to payors and patients.

What kind of individual skill sets are now required by the pharma industry to meet these challenges?

To meet these challenges, pharma companies need varied and specialised talent. This has paved the way for talented professionals from clinical, pharmacological, pharmaceutical, marketing, and legal disciplines.

What kind of career opportunities can medical graduates hope for with a pharma company?

Medical graduates can aspire for multiple opportunities with pharma and services companies like Indegene. Some of these include medical writing (covering regulatory, publication or content development for physicians, patients, and sales force), programme management or client servicing for global companies, and Medical Service Liaisons (MSLs) with the focus on scientific selling. Given the fact that global pharma companies will launch new products in India, there will be a huge demand for MSLs. Medico marketing involving work in/with the marketing teams of pharma companies in brand management and medical affairs, involving work in/with the medical affairs team of pharma companies in the areas of publications, scientific communication, medical information management, etc are two other areas of opportunity as well.

What kind of career opportunities can a law graduate hope for with a pharma company?

It takes multidisciplinary teams with a variety of skills to develop and market effective and safe drugs. Pharma companies are seeking to hire graduates with supplementary knowledge relevant to the pharma industry, like professionals from law or patent or IPR understanding in addition to the requisite domain knowledge. Relevant understanding of the allied subjects in addition to core clinical/pharmaceutical knowledge will be key differentiators. Law graduates can also look at KPOs in addition to pharma companies.

What kind of jobs areas are pharma companies recruiting for? What kind of skills sets are most in demand? (globally and in India)

Pharma companies in India are expanding their sales force and medical affairs teams. However, in the developed markets, there is a rapid reduction in sales force as companies are realigning themselves to the new landscape. With the increased role of regulators and payors in these developed markets, new career avenues are being created in areas like health economics and outcome research, market access, and account management.

Rationalisation of jobs in developed markets has led companies like Indegene to expand and provide services to global pharma companies. Jobs are being created across board in Indegene for skills like medical writing, medical affairs, tele-detailing, digital marketing, medical information management, analytics and information research, technology, graphics design, medical editing, other creative capabilities, and a host of other skills. A platform like Indegene not only enables people to engage with major pharma companies across different geographies but also across different functions.

What kind of changes are required in pharmacy and medical syllabi to meet the evolving needs of the pharma industry?

Unlike in the West, India does not have specialised medical writing and communication courses. In fact, for the most part, medical writing and communication is not a part of the current pharma and medical syllabi in India.

This is a significant gap that needs to be bridged. Such courses will enable different skills to come together. So, apart from domain and technical knowledge, individuals will get to understand the challenges and nuances involved in effectively communicating medical/scientific information to a broad range of target audience, including physicians, patients, sales force, regulators, and payors.