



The First of its Kind in the East Africa Community Region - the New Research & Development Centre at Beta Healthcare International

By Fred Ndung'u

A brainchild of Dr Sanjay Advani, CEO, Beta Shelys Africa Holding Company (the holding company for Beta Healthcare International, Nairobi; Beta Healthcare Uganda Ltd- Kampala, Uganda & Shelys Pharmaceuticals Ltd-Dar es Salaam, Tanzania) and his management support team, Beta Healthcare International's Research & Development (R&D) Centre has its foundation based on the company's need to expand its product portfolio to cover more therapeutics areas and increase its revenue base for its investors.

The Centre shall endeavour to ensure better control of price; aim to provide affordable home-grown pharmaceutical solutions and given the thin line between conventional and herbal medicines, give both classifications without boundaries, equal and undivided attention.

Shelys Africa Holding Company (of Beta Healthcare International in Kenya and Shelys Pharmaceuticals in Tanzania) CEO, Dr Sanjay Advani, and Beta Healthcare International's Head of Scientific Affairs Dr Nelson Odhiambo recently shed more light on the Centre's operations in a chat with Fred Ndung'u.

The Centre, situated at Beta Healthcare International's head office along Mogadishu Rd in Nairobi's Industrial hub was officially launched on September 10th this

year by Hon Anyang Nyong'o Kenya's Medical Services Minister



Dr. Sanjay Advani
CEO, Shelys Africa Holdings

at a colourful ceremony patronized by many, major pharmaceutical industry stakeholders.

Significant funds, running into tens of millions of shillings, have been invested in the project, the first of its kind in the EAC region offering designed R&D and which its investors are convinced is a worthy cause in tandem with their overall objective of providing high quality and affordable products in the pharmaceutical market.

The R&D Centre's mission echoes Beta Healthcare's continued

commitment to provide answers to the region's quest for provision of high quality healthcare. The Centre shall partner with many others in need of R & D solutions including pharmaceutical firms, individual scientists in the field of biomedical sciences among others and institutions of higher learning among others in the company's mission to offer solutions to the healthcare challenges facing mankind.

The project kicked off in January 2012 with a rapid progress programme that included designing of the facility, acquisition & setting up of the necessary equipment & reagents and building up of a team to ensure success of the facility. The team comprises highly qualified and experienced analysts, skilled equipment operators, experienced researchers in formulation development, and material procurement personnel all of

whom have organized themselves and set timelines for various activities to ensure the project's success.

Further, the team is collaborating with experienced staff from the Aspen Holdings of South Africa (with branches in Australia, Brazil, Mexico and Germany among other countries—this providing for global capabilities) and Shelys Pharmaceuticals, Tanzania.

Dr Sanjay Advani explained: "the facility is focusing on all therapeutic areas with emphasis on oral dosage forms and topical applications and



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shall also pay special attention to R&D for orphan and neglected tropical diseases therapeutics as part of its social responsibility.

This however, shall be determined from time to time on resources setting.” In the past, R&D has tended to neglect the orphan diseases due to several factors including at times low incidence of the diseases, very long periods before investments can recoup profits and low profitability from the ventures.

“Our strengths at this Centre include a dedicated team of experts coupled with sufficient machinery & equipment and a market intelligence & research capacity able to design market-oriented problem-solving products that shall progressively propel us to even greater heights. Essentially, therefore, our R & D shall be market-driven and in tandem with our inner desire to remain a good corporate citizen in the region,” explained Dr Odhiambo. The Centre is in a de facto partnership with Aspen Holdings other R & D centres in Port Elizabeth and Johannesburg, South Africa.

Already, R&D initiatives are ongoing at the Centre on several oral formulations that are providing for a technology transfer arrangement with Aspen S. Africa; once success is attained, these will undergo regulatory and registration processes with the PPB (Pharmacy & poisons Board of Kenya) and then be officially launched.

R&D periods vary for different products formulations and are often

from 9 to 24 months which is the reasonable time to expect results, Dr Odhiambo responded when I



Dr. Nelson Odhiambo ,Head of Scientific Affairs, Beta Healthcare

asked about the time citizens should tentatively expect to use the very first products from the Centre.

He explained the pivotal role of the sales& marketing team at the company in pointing towards society and market needs and in helping towards quality assurance and quality issues. The Centre has designed various analytical processes and validations. It has generated lots of the requisite documentations both for operations and regulatory requirements.

Dr Odhiambo explained that training and re-training of the Centre’s employees is a continuous process among other issues the various aspects of R&D in pharmaceutical technology; “this has ensured an inherent competency level in the organization coupled with information exchange from other collaborators both within and outside Africa,” he said.

The Centre is a result of much inter-departmental efforts at the

company; of remarkable mention is the Finance department which has graciously provided the finances to see this project through,” explained Dr Odhiambo. Yet financial needs in such a project are overwhelming resulting in deficits that have been one of the key challenges in a situation where different needs for financing are ever present.

The challenge of inadequate personnel is being addressed daily internally and with external training. Acquisition of raw materials (of which Kenya is not a producer) has also presented another challenge since imported materials are also costly and one is never assured of the requisite quality.

Not having acquired all the equipment it is keen to have, the Centre has adopted a phase-wise approach and employs a wise procurement by acquiring the required equipment and machinery on priority basis; “we have acquired quite a number but few others still need to be sourced,” he added.

Regarding achievements, and perhaps challenges, expected in the novel and unique project, Dr Sanjay Advani said; “like in any scientific process, we have and can expect uncertainties in outcome before we get the desired results. Our many trials may not give the desired outcome, yet we shall always consider failed trials as a learning process and a lesson on how some processes can’t work. By failing, we fail forward and hope to gain lots of experience in formulations’ development that we can share with other partners such as students, fellow researchers and institutions of



higher learning among others.”

He added; “Excellent results and good things don’t come easy. We need the proper hard work, determination and consistency. We shall reach some goals sometimes encouraged by the fact that some of the success stories in the pharmaceuticals started somewhere and through R& D focus are today counting excellent outcomes.”

Though the Centre has, entirely been funded by Beta Healthcare International, it is keen to share information especially technical knowledge in various aspects of formulations development with other researchers elsewhere in the world; “we shall not close our doors to flow of information in and out so long as it is relevant for our objectives,” Dr Odhiambo averred.

And depending on where one is or headed, one has to find means of attaining future goals. “As a key player in the pharmaceutical industry, Beta Health International has considered market trends and realized that survival whether locally or internationally depends on R&D. As part of the Aspen Group, we are giving our business and operations a global approach given the immense

changes being experienced in the pharmaceuticals world. We shall keep monitoring and factoring in the trends in our entire present and



Beta Healthcare advanced Lab equipments

future product portfolio.

“We are also keenly monitoring the Kenya government intervention to challenges in the provision of healthcare in the country. We are cognizant of the fact that the government is keen to avail affordable and high quality medicines in its distribution systems and considering these realities, R&D remains the way forward. Further, it is the desired commitment of our CEO Dr Sanjay to ensure we remain a relevant player in the pharmaceutical industry by responding to this global and Kenya government needs.”

Final words: “The road may not be a very easy one but we have a team determined

to succeed,” concluded Dr Sanjay Advani

Unique and Adequate facilities: Prior to this discussion, Dr Odhiambo took our team on a tour of the facility situated just next to Beta Healthcare’s majestic and ultra-modern plant.

The Centre prides in a Research & Information Room stocked with diverse books and literature to boost collaborations with others; and a Conference Room equipped with a mounted power point projector (showing continued dedication to training and CPE -continuous pharmacy education) on the first floor.

On ground floor is the laboratory with several equipment including the Spectrometer (able to identify any unknown pharmaceutical products); an Oven Drier (mostly dries powders); a bottles batch of a new cough syrup awaiting stability studies (to certify declared shelf life); high precision Weighing Machines with sensitivity to 4 decimal points; the Rapid Shear Mixer & Granulator; and computerized Fluid Bed Dryers that can handle several batches simultaneously.

Other equipment were the Programmed Logical Control that offers soft control parameter for the highest quality in the final product; a brand new Karanavati (India) Mini Press/Compression Machine for manufacturing tablets; a Mini Cap for making capsules- (fed with the active ingredients, it is able to open, insert and close capsule to pre-determined weight and releases them at the collection point) and a Mini-Coater (with tablets fed at a collection pan) for coating bitter drugs.



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