



Beta Healthcare

Spearheading R&D in Pharmaceuticals



Dr. Sanjay Advani, Chief Executive Beta Healthcare.



Manufacturing in general is one of the parameters that gauge the level of development in an Economy. According to economic benchmarks the bigger a country's manufacturing industry, the more industrialised and developed it is deemed to be. According to Dr. Sanjay Advani, the Beta Healthcare Director and CEO, manufacturing may entail replicating products or systems but credit goes to sectors that endeavour to conduct research, and develop their own products through innovative approaches or utilise local resources to make similar—if not superior products—invented by other organisations. This concept, popularly referred to as research and development (R&D), is currently not well developed in emerging economies—mainly due to the hefty resources required and the return on investment (ROI) considerations—Kenya

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Dr. Nelson Odhiambo, Production Manager

nor pharmaceutical companies in Sub Saharan being not exceptions.

According to Wikipedia, the activities that are classified as R&D differ from company to company, but there are two primary models. In one model, the primary function of an R&D group is to develop new products; in the other model, the primary function of an R&D group is to discover and create new knowledge about scientific and technological topics for the purpose of uncovering and enabling development of valuable new products, processes, and services. Under both models, R&D differs from the vast majority of a company's activities which are intended to yield nearly immediate profit or immediate improvements in operations and involve little uncertainty as to ROI. The first model of R&D is generally staffed by engineers while the second model may be staffed with industrial scientists. R&D activities are carried out by corporate or Governmental entities. New product design and development is more often than not a crucial factor in the survival of a company. In an industry that is changing fast, firms must continually revise their design and range of products. This is necessary due to continuous technology change and development as well as other competitors and the changing preference of customers. Without an R&D program, a firm must rely on strategic alliances, acquisitions, and networks to tap into the innovations of others.

"In R&D, you have to be committed and patient. In fact you must be prepared to fail, but fail forward," says Dr. Sanjay. He asserts that there are no "quick fixes" in the field of research, but focus, dedication and sufficient patience is a prerequisite.

The Beta Healthcare R&D section is the brainchild Dr. Sanjay who has devoted time and mobilised resources that have enabled the initiative to take shape and is now ready for official inauguration by the Minister for Health Services this month.

"An R&D initiative is a capital-intensive engagement, and given that ROI is not necessarily immediate, many organisations opt not to venture into it, but we are grateful that our CEO is very passionate about this initiative, and that has enabled us to come this far," comments Dr. Nelson Odhiambo, the company's head of scientific affairs.

The driving force of Beta Healthcare's R&D venture is based on the need for development of products that can compete favourably in the global pharma market in terms of quality, efficacy and affordability. "The way to go in any industry is determined by the level of R&D and it is towards this end that this section was started," explains Dr. Sanjay adding, "We need to come up with home-grown solutions to the issues that impact our pharmaceutical sector. Success of this initiative may serve as a godsend in this region at a time when majority of our people seldom afford prescription drugs due to high prices. We believe our research objectives will be directed to give an answer to challenges unique to this county and this region."

In addition, as per Beta Healthcare's mission statement and through this initiative the company will demonstrate its commitment to good corporate citizenship since it will procure major factors of production from within the country on scale-up manufacturing. "We will source for materials from within if they are available and we believe this in a way will go to providing sources of income and job opportunities in the country," Dr. Odhiambo reveals but points out that, "The raw materials will have to be of the right quality as the drugs we produce will have to conform to internationally set pharmaceutical standards."

Since the Beta Healthcare R&D section is a first of its kind in the country, Dr. Odhiambo admits that the going has not been easy so far. "Besides the financial challenges we had at the start since the company did not have a huge allocation in its budget, we also didn't have adequate personnel but our CEO's commitment and our collaborative efforts with our sister plants in Tanzania and South Africa, have made us come this far," he adds.

Dr. Sanjay says that there is yet a lot of ground to be covered in order to put pharmaceutical R&D in Kenya on the world map, especially in terms of intellectual capacity. To achieve the foregoing, he reveals that the company intends to partner with institutions of higher learning and experienced companies the world over to boost capacity building. Besides the partnerships, Beta Healthcare is working closely with regulatory authorities in its efforts to conform to marketing authorisation requirements and standards and attain the requisite approvals.

About Beta Healthcare

Beta Healthcare is an Aspen group company. The company has a product portfolio comprising of over-the-counter medication, herbal range and ethical products. The company's domestic customer base is spread throughout Kenya while export sales are generated from other parts of East and Central Africa, including Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda and Congo.

Beta Healthcare has its footprints in Eastern, Central and West African regions. The company is a pioneer in herbal medication in Kenya developing lifestyle brands that are serving niche yet crucial needs of the African Consumer. Beta Healthcare International has a sister company, Shelys Pharmaceuticals, operating in Tanzania that is also a leader in the script market in Sub Saharan Africa. Shelys' manufacturing facility in Dar-es-Salaam was recently been upgraded and is capable of manufacturing a wide range of products.