

Only strong patent protection can drive investments from West into India: Nobel Laureate Kurt Wuthrich

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Patent protection in India would help drive future research initiatives. Investments in research is a high risk venture and only a sound patent protection will attract the west to invest in Asia, said Nobel Laureate Kurt Wuthrich, professor, structural biology, Scripps Research Institute, USA and professor, structural genomics ETH, Zurich.

India's biopharma growth is impressive, but the country needs to ensure that it does not lose out to China which is sound and strong on patents and intellectual property rights. There is need to intensify patent laws included in the WTO's agreement on intellectual property, the Trade-Related aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement. There is need for the right expertise to comprehend the patentable versions of drugs, said Prof. Wuthrich who was here in India for the Biocon Research Centre inauguration.

Quoting the Novartis' Gleevec challenge on India's patent law, he said patent protection encourages research and this would also attract potential investments from the West for affordable and efficacious drugs, he added.

Biotech is the future for top quality drugs. It will not only be innovative medicines that would play a role but biosimilars are being viewed as the future growth for biopharmaceutical industry globally, said the Nobel Laureate.

Biotech drugs which are high priced are widely popular and biosimilars open the doors for affordable access. The development of biosimilars unlike a small molecule is not easy. There is considerable science and technology which goes into its development, he said.

Even the US biosimilar guideline, which is pending clearance, will be a landmark regulation for the industry. Until the issue of biosimilar regulation is not solved, it would be difficult for the industry to pursue future initiatives.

The current scene for research globally is subdued. The impact of the global economic recession has led to drastic cut down in research investments and government grants. This led to not just fall in assignments but loss of jobs across the spectrum of scientific community and administrative posts.

However, this cost cutting measure has led to open up opportunities for markets in Asia covering India, China, Singapore, Malaysia and Korea, because the western world is now opting to outsource from cost-effective and high quality markets. India figures prominently in this for high technology assignments. The country's pool of scientific talent and high quality capability has resulted in faster turnaround for outsourced jobs so far, said Prof. Wuthrich who bagged the Nobel Prize in chemistry in 2002.

Future of global biotech research is moving away from personalized medicine to tackle mass medical needs covering sleep apnoea in adults, dehydration caused by diarrhoea in paediatrics and ageing population disorders like dementia, auto immune diseases and pain control, he stated.