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AHMEDABAD: Biosimilars have emerged as a lucrative market for Gujarat's pharmaceutical companies. Leading companies like Cadila Healthcare, Intas Pharmaceuticals and Torrent Pharmaceuticals have begun tapping the biosimilars market with their product pipelines.

Biological drug products are made up of living organisms rather than chemicals and are used in medications which help fight certain cancers, arthritis and other diseases. A biosimilar is a biologic medical product, which is copy of an original product that is manufactured by a different company .

For instance, Cadila Healthcare has become the first company to launch the biosimilar of Adalimumab, the most preferred therapy for the treatment of auto immune disorders like rheumatoid arthritis and psoriasis. According to sources, a vial of the original version costs about \$1,000 (around Rs 60,000) in the US, while Cadila is likely to sell the same at \$200 (approx Rs 13,000).

"Biosimilars segment is the future and the competition is also low at present. Last year we launched around seven products and about four more are in the pipeline," said Pankaj Patel, CMD, Cadila Healthcare.

Similarly , Intas recently launched Intacept, the biosimilar to Amgen's Enbrel. Binish Chudgar, vice chairman of Intas Pharma said that the company now has nine biosimilar products in the market. "We have a rich pipeline of future products to ensure cost effective alternates to imported and expensive biologic therapies," said Chudgar.

The global biosimilars market is estimated to be around \$10 billion and currently India has a very low share of around 5%. Among the handful of companies that are working on developing products in this segment include Biocon, Reliance Lifesciences, Cipla, and Wockhardt besides Gujarat's pharma companies.

According to Pharmaceuticals Export Promotion Council, more than 100 major Indian pharmaceutical companies are in the process of investing in research on biosimilars.

Another leading pharma company from Ahmedabad, Torrent Pharmaceuticals has entered into an exclusive licensing agreement with Reliance Life Sciences for marketing three biosimilars - rituximab, adalimumab and cetuximab, in India. Reliance Life Sciences will develop these products at its plant in Mumbai and supply these products to Torrent Pharma. Rituximab and cetuximab are used in the treatment of various cancers like leukemia, lymphoma, colorectal, head and neck cancers.