

Rel Life Sciences to focus on R&D, for now

Co Set To Launch Fifth Biosimilar Drug, Seek Approvals For Clinical Trials & Stem-Cell Treatment

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MUKESH Ambani-owned pharmaceutical company Reliance Life Sciences is continuing on its research path rather than initiating a big bang expansion plan just yet, unlike the group's recent approach on some other fronts.

The company is all set to launch its fifth biosimilar, or generic version of biological drugs, to treat infertility called follicle stimulating hormone (FSH). The company is also applying for approvals to start trials of three monoclonal anti-bodies and two stem cell treatments, KV Subramaniam, president and CEO, Reliance Life Science told **ET**.

FSH has been imported in India for nearly 20 years and is used by a fifth of the infertility patients requiring hormone treatment, said Dr Indira Hinduja, honorary gynaecologist at Hinduja Hospital. The treatment currently costs Rs 75,000-80,000, she said.

Reliance Life Sciences plans to offer the treatment at Rs 45,000, Mr Subramaniam said. The company will look at exporting it to semi-regulated markets. Global sales of FSH in 2009 were \$1.21 billion (approximately Rs 5,659 crore).



FERTILE PLANS

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liance Life Sciences is likely to seek regulatory approvals for its launch by September.

The biosimilar market is relatively untapped as far as Indian companies are concerned. The global market for biosimilars is estimated at over \$19 billion, and like all new things, the industry expects to make significant

profits from early on. Yet, it is a market that many, including Dr Reddy's and Biocon have been eyeing for at least the last four years but have not found success.

The company has also completed drug trials and made regulatory submissions for the launch of stem cell therapies to treat conjunctival disorders and de-pigmentation of skin, he said. "We have also had four successful cases of treating beta thalassemia transplants from cord blood," he added. Beta thalassemia results in defective production of red blood cells and causes anaemia. Reliance Life Sciences is one of the only Indian companies running a public cord blood bank.

Research in monoclonal antibodies is the buzz in pharmaceutical research with Biocon and Glenmark saying they have promising candidates for some therapeutic areas. Reliance Life Sciences' candidates are in

oncology or treatment for cancer, cardiology and anti-viral segments. The company has complied documents that it will send to the drug controller general of India, or DCGI, for approval to start human trials. Drugs must undergo four phases of trials before they can be marketed. Typically, the process takes between three to four years. Biocon and Glenmark's monoclonal antibodies are already in phase II.

MPM Capital and Reliance Life Science have a strategic alliance to start an India-specific investment fund, but the Indian company has not exercised that option yet. Mr Subramaniam said. "There is no immediate plan on the horizon to start the fund." The company will focus on its own research programs for at least a year more.

Mr Subramaniam also ruled out possibilities of a sudden inorganic growth in that period.

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