

# Novartis seeks to deepen India innovation play

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New Delhi: Swiss pharma major Novartis is sharpening its strategy in India as a pure-play innovator across core therapy segments, including cardiovascular, oncology and immunology,

after divesting its stake in its listed arm earlier this year.

Significantly, India increasingly contributes to nearly every molecule that Novartis commercialises globally, and is moving further up the value chain, with early scientific discovery -- Phase I studies, beginning to take shape in the country, Novartis India country president and MD Amitabh Dube told TOI.

In Feb, Novartis under a strategic review announced the sale of its 71% stake in its listed subsidiary, Novartis India, effectively exiting its legacy portfolio for about Rs 1,446 crore to a clutch of private equity investors, led by ChrysCapital. It retained its unlisted commercial arm, Novartis Healthcare, to drive its innovative medicines business in the country.

Typically, India largely serves as a development hub handling Phase II and III trials for MNCs, while early-stage research or innovation-intensive segments remain concentrated in developed markets.

Novartis recently initiated Phase I clinical research in Ahmedabad and will continue late-stage Phase II and III programmes across its core therapeutic areas, Dube said in his first interview, following the review.

A few of these global therapies, where India played a major role include Coartem Baby, the first antimalarial developed for infants, cardiovascular therapy Inclisiran (Sybrava), and a targeted radioactive therapy for prostate cancer Lutetium-177 vipivotide tetraxetan (Pluvicto).

Novartis operates one of its three global development hubs in India (Hyderabad and Mumbai), alongside Basel (Switzerland) and the US. For instance, the India Development Hub contributed in four critical areas in Coartem Baby -- supporting clinical operations, pharmaceutical development, regulatory submissions and safety oversight.

"Our philosophy has been to transform into a pure-play innovative medicines company. It would not have been appropriate to retain these (legacy) brands without the right investments and focus. Our commitment to India remains strong-we have over 9,000 employees, launched two new molecules last year, and plan to launch one this year and two next year," added Dube.

**News Source:**

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