News Archives

Nicholas Piramal targets Europe with new innovation centre

by Emilie Reymond, in-pharmatechnologist

12/10/2006 - In its ambition to become one of the top three global players in custom manufacturing, the UK subsidiary of drug-maker Nicholas Piramal (NPIL) has created a new “innovation unit” in Europe.

The dedicated unit, dubbed NPIL(i) and unveiled at CphI last week, is aimed at developing new technologies for faster, more cost effective process development and production of active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs).

NPIL said the new centre, based in the UK but in cooperation with the firm's new research centre in Mumbai, will control the development of the firm's new chiral technology SCRAM – a new catalyst-based racemisation technology that delivers significantly improved process yields in the production of chiral amines and alcohols, cutting cost and environmental waste.

“NPIL(i) is looking for step changes through technologies that can accelerate commercial production efficiencies for increasingly complex and costly pharma products,” said Ian Grudy, who will be leading the unit's team.

The company has been dramatically stepping up efforts to increase its global expansion in pharma custom services in the last few months and the launch of NPIL(i) is its fourth significant move in Europe this year.

The firm's previous key steps have included the acquisition of Avecia Pharmaceuticals business last December and the buy of Pfizer's Morpeth, England, manufacturing unit in June in a deal that made the Indian company a key supplier to the drug giant.

The Indian firm's recent barrage on Europe is no doubt causing unease amongst Europe's API manufacturing veterans, who are currently facing big challenges from low-cost Asian manufacturers, threatened by continuous price reductions of APIs and other basic chemicals, as well as significantly lower production costs.

This is happening in a European market place that is already bursting at the seams, full of players with similar production capabilities, technology portfolios, and equally efficient chemical processes.

A recent report from Frost & Sullivan suggests that in order to stay competitive, Europe's fine chemical suppliers should not try to beat their Asian competitors in their own game but instead must seek to gain new advantages through restructuring and innovation and evaluate new growth opportunities in niche segments and in biopharmaceuticals as a way of breathing new life into their businesses.