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Drugs giants join the trail to India

Andrew Leach, Mail on Sunday
4 April 2004

FIRST came call centres, then computer software development and financial analysis. Now it is drugs research that Western companies are planning to outsource to India.

European drugs giants such as GlaxoSmithKline and AstraZeneca are building alliances and increasing investment in India, which is now forecast to become a major centre for clinical trials.

About 1% of global clinical trials are conducted in India, but Cambridge-based consultancy Oxygen Healthcare predicts that this could rise to 10% in five years.

Director Sunil Shah said lower costs and a highly educated workforce would encourage the trend, but one of the biggest attractions was the huge pool of potential patients.

'One of the hardest tasks in clinical trials is recruiting the patients to take part, and if this can be improved, development can be speeded up,' he said.

'The size of India's population and the

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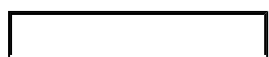
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prevalence of certain diseases make the country an attractive location for drugs companies.'

GlaxoSmithKline recently formed an alliance with Ranbaxy, India's biggest drugs company, to research new treatments.

Jean-Pierre Garnier, chief executive of GSK, said that research and development budgets went much further in India than in America or Europe because of lower costs.

The Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry said India had clear attractions for Western companies.

Spokesman Richard Ley said: 'India is more than likely to emerge as a centre of trials. The country is very attractive for research into diseases such as tuberculosis, which is common there.'

AstraZeneca has a centre in Bangalore, where more than 100 scientists work on medicines for the developing world.

Last year it opened a new facility there to find new treatments for TB, which is diagnosed in two million people a year in India and more than eight million worldwide.

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