

INTERVIEW

Making Indian healthcare self-reliant in a global ecosystem

Shuba Nagesh, Managing Director - GE BEL & General Manager- ISC South Asia, GE HealthCare in an interaction with **Express Healthcare** talks about the current landscape of medtech manufacturing in India

How has the landscape for local manufacturing in the medtech sector evolved over the years?

As per Invest India, India's medtech market is growing at an impressive 15 per cent CAGR. India's disease burden is shifting from communicable, maternal, neonatal, and nutritional diseases to non-communicable diseases like cardiovascular diseases, cancers, chronic respiratory diseases, and diabetes. This shift, in turn, has catalysed a shift from curative healthcare to preventive healthcare. The burden calls for more optimised diagnosis with the use of precision diagnostic tools that integrate AI, big data for more accurate mapping of patient data and personalised treatment protocols.

Traditionally, India relied heavily on imports, but the focus is now shifting towards domestic production to improve affordability and accessibility. The Government is taking proactive steps by incentivising domestic production of high-quality medical devices through PLI-Production Linked Incentive and through Promotion of Research & Innovation in the Pharma sector (PRIP), attracting investments in medical devices segments.

India's medical devices manufacturing footprint is developing further in scale and geography, with 250+ organisations engaged in innovations for addressing critical health issues and dedicated medical devices



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manufacturing clusters. Additionally, opening foreign direct investment in the medtech sector has facilitated collaborations and technology transfer, bringing global expertise to the Indian market.

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personalised, cost-effective, and sustainable healthcare solutions. The landscape for local manufacturing in the Indian medtech sector has evolved positively, driven by government support, regulatory reforms, market demand, technological advancements, and increased investment. This trend is expected to continue, further strengthening India's position as a hub for medical device manufacturing in the region.

There are many policies that are now favoring manufacturing in India. As a global medtech company investing in India, what are your views on the current policy ecosystem?

The policy ecosystem in India offers promising opportunities for global medtech companies, addressing challenges related to regulatory compliance, infrastructure, skills development, and intellectual property protection, essential for unlocking the full potential of the Indian market. Collaborating with government stakeholders, the industry, and local partners, leveraging government programs, and adopting a long-term strategic approach has helped navigate the complexities and maximise the benefits of investing in India's growing healthcare sector. The government's intervention through incentive schemes and the recent National Medical Devices Policy 2023

strengthens the aspiration of making India the global manufacturing hub and innovation hub for Medical Devices, growing R&D and innovation of futuristic medical technologies.

Many industries, including medical devices, share a common base of sub-components' manufacturing, and newer policies should focus on boosting electronics, PCB infrastructure, and raw material availability for the scale of growth that is being targeted. While the policy ecosystem focuses on the public healthcare institutions being encouraged to prioritise the procurement of domestically-manufactured medical devices, 80 per cent of the procurement is currently from the private sector and needs to be incentivised with economic benefit to buy locally-manufactured medical devices. Rebates could be provided to private healthcare providers buying locally manufactured medical equipment in underserved areas and for imported medical devices of similar specifications. Steps like extending Import of Goods at Concessional Rate of Duty (IGCRD) incentives for procurement from EOU (Export Oriented Unit) /EHTP (Electronic Hardware Technology Park) are currently applicable only for imported parts that are used in the local manufacturing of certain medical devices go a long way in strengthening localisation.

The policies aimed at

creating a conducive environment for medtech manufacturing, leading to increased domestic production, affordability & accessibility are much appreciated, and while the efforts to harmonise standards, facilitate exports, simplifying the regulatory process are underway, the speed of approvals (especially for products from platforms already approved) is of the essence.

Even as we manufacture locally, healthcare expenses continue to impact patients. What can be done to address the talk on affordable care?

Affordability for citizens and patients through Government initiatives like Ayushman Bharat and the Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Yojana covers today about 37 per cent of the total population, and these health schemes offer standardised benefits and ensure that providers offer the best care to all pockets of our society. While the scheme itself can be strengthened to go deeper and broader, aspects like telemedicine, digital health platforms, and electronic medical records can further streamline processes, improve efficiency, and reduce administrative costs.

Addressing the issue of affordable healthcare requires a multifaceted approach: Aggressively boosting healthcare infrastructure in government hospitals through advanced medical diagnostic infrastructure—preventative and therapeutic. Doubling down in both scale and quality of healthcare in government hospitals is the need of the hour for the 1.4 billion citizens of our country. Strengthening policies to encourage local purchases, both in government and private hospitals.

Engaging and involving all stakeholders, including governments, healthcare providers, insurers, pharma companies, and medical

device manufacturers, to step up collaborative efforts through public and private healthcare partnerships, leveraging strengths and addressing gaps. Conscious advancement in services, preventive healthcare schemes, value-based care, healthcare financing, technology, innovation, and regulatory reforms can help create strong healthcare infrastructure. These strategies, if executed in a coordinated manner, can work towards making healthcare more affordable and accessible for all individuals, ultimately improving health outcomes and enhancing overall well-being.

When we speak about 'Make in India', what is GE HealthCare's vision in India?

India is committed to achieving 'Universal Health Care for All' by 2030, and GE HealthCare aims to be at the forefront of that movement by leveraging its global expertise in innovative medical technology to design better tools that combine better clinical outcomes with accessibility and affordability. As a country that has the potential to become the medtech manufacturing hub of the world, India's greatest strength lies in its dynamic demographic. At GE HealthCare, we are investing in research and development to create innovative medical technologies specifically designed for the needs of the Indian population. This will not only improve access to cutting-edge healthcare but also create intellectual property within the country. Our presence in India, both as one of the largest global engineering and manufacturing hubs, has positioned us to expand and scale up our manufacturing footprint to serve increasing needs production and reduce dependence on imports to make medical devices more affordable and accessible. Our vision for, and in India has always been to bring

together a fragmented medtech ecosystem by leveraging indigenous R&D to curate products and services, manufactured in India for the world to make healthcare more accessible, affordable, precise, and connected.

Nearly three decades ago, we embarked on our manufacturing journey in India through thriving joint ventures in South Asia with Wipro and BEL. Presently, our operations in India are conducted through four manufacturing facilities that produce a wide range of medical technologies, including CT scanners, Cath lab equipment, ultrasound scanners, patient monitoring solutions, ECG machines, and ventilators, including hi-tech subsystems like X-Ray Tubes, High Voltage Generators, among others.

In 2022, Wipro GE Healthcare launched the Medical Device Manufacturing (MDM) facility in Bengaluru under the Indian government's Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme, aligning with the National Agenda of Atmanirbhar Bharat. The vision was to encourage local manufacturing of medical devices in the country. The greenfield facility had set up 24/7 operations for manufacturing CT machines, Cath lab equipment ultrasound scanners, patient monitoring solutions, ECG machines, and ventilators.

Could you discuss some of your products or services catering to the country's local needs?

The organisation's emphasis on localisation is evident in our product lineup, with landmark achievements such as the Mac 400 ECG Machine (2007) and the Made in India PET CT system for cancer diagnosis (2014). In 2022, we launched Revolution Aspire at Wipro GE Healthcare's MDM plant, which is an advanced imaging solution designed and manufactured end-to-end in India. Our first Revolution ACT was designed and manufactured

in India, which was more affordable and compact than previous models, making it ideal for smaller hospitals and clinics, in keeping with the needs of the existing Indian healthcare facilities. Our Revolution Aspire CT system was another end-to-end Make in India CT Scanner designed for higher clinical efficiency aimed at addressing the needs of tier 2 and 3 cities.

GE HealthCare has been at the forefront in R&D and Engineering since it was established in the John F. Welch Technology Center in 2000, boasting a team of over 1800 engineers and technologists. This center has been instrumental in developing innovative solutions, filing over 1100 patents, and delivering cutting-edge products. Additionally, our commitment to innovation is evident in initiatives such as the establishment of the brand's first 5G innovation lab in Healthcare Technology Centre India (HTCI) Bengaluru – the first for GE HealthCare, globally.

Beyond manufacturing and R&D, our expansive service organisation plays a crucial role in maintaining the quality and reliability of our products. The GE HealthCare team is dedicated to servicing and maintaining equipment in hospitals, ensuring that our products consistently meet the highest standards of performance and reliability.

GE HealthCare offers a range of products and services tailored to address the specific healthcare needs of India. Here are some examples:

◆ **Affordable diagnostic imaging solutions:** We provide a variety of diagnostic imaging solutions designed to meet the needs of healthcare facilities across India, from large urban hospitals to smaller clinics in rural areas. These solutions include X-ray systems, ultrasound machines, and computed tomography (CT) scanners that are affordable, reliable, and easy to use.

◆ **Maternal and infant care solutions:** Given the importance of maternal and infant health in India, we offer specialised products and services to support maternal and neonatal care. This includes fetal monitoring systems, incubators, and neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) equipment designed to ensure the health and safety of mothers and newborns during childbirth and the postnatal period.

◆ **Cardiovascular health solutions:** We provide a range of cardiovascular imaging and monitoring solutions, including electrocardiography (ECG) machines, echocardiography systems, and cardiac stress testing equipment, to help healthcare providers diagnose and manage heart conditions effectively.

◆ **Digital healthcare solutions:** We offer digital healthcare solutions that leverage technology to improve access to healthcare services and enhance patient care outcomes. This includes telemedicine platforms, remote monitoring systems, and electronic health record (EHR) systems that enable healthcare providers to deliver care more efficiently and effectively, particularly in remote and underserved areas.

◆ **Community health initiatives:** GE HealthCare is involved in community health initiatives aimed at improving health outcomes and raising awareness about preventive healthcare practices. This includes partnerships with local healthcare organisations, NGOs, and government agencies to provide screenings, vaccinations, health education programs, and other community-based interventions.

By offering innovative solutions, supporting healthcare infrastructure development, and promoting capacity building and community engagement, GE HealthCare aims to make a positive impact on healthcare delivery and outcomes across India.