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India, US to begin joint research on low cost diagnostics, medical devices

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India and the US will soon embark on collaborative research projects in the area of low cost medical device development, low cost diagnostics and imaging technology. The Indo-US collaborations in this regard are aimed at developing medical technologies that can significantly impact under-served populations within the US and India.

According to sources, the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) had signed a joint statement way back in October, 2007 with National Institute of Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering (NIBIB) of DHHS, USA in this regard to develop low cost diagnostics and therapeutics technologies for evaluation and improvement of global health. The DBT and the NIBIB reviewed and finalised the programme recently.

The diagnostic technologies identified for the collaborations include glucose monitoring for diabetics; low-cost platform technologies for multiple (multivalent) diagnostic tests; a multiplex, lab-on-a-chip technology for Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) and other infections; point-of-care diagnostics for infant screening; a pre-screening test for blood bank safety; diagnostic test for the early detection of cardiovascular disease; and point-of-care tests and reagents for cancer screening.

The list also includes networked and mobile technologies for diagnostic devices; diagnostic screening devices simple enough to be operated by people with minimal education (10th grade); non-invasive or minimally-invasive screening technologies (e.g. low-cost imaging, microfluidics, microchip blood tests to detect circulating tumor cells); diagnostic intermediates/biomarker development (e.g. recombinant proteins, monoclonal antibodies) for low-cost screening kits; and appropriate, low-cost diagnostic imaging devices for low-resource settings.

All these areas were identified at a workshop in Hyderabad in 2008 which examined the needs and opportunities for low-cost diagnostic and therapeutic medical technologies for use in underserved settings.

The purpose of this program is to encourage collaborative research and/or technology development between scientists and engineers in the US and India. The NIBIB has announced the availability of administrative supplements for current NIBIB-supported research grants. Supplements will be provided to develop appropriate diagnostic and therapeutic medical technologies for low-resource settings. Appropriate medical technologies are useable, cost effective, sustainable, and effective in meeting a significant clinical need in a low-resource setting.

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