

They're all doing it – buying drug research

It is not easy to navigate the complex infrastructure for drug development in Sweden, where various contract players exist alongside the pharmaceutical companies.

BY BOEL JÖNSSON

According to a report from the Swedish Agency for Growth Policy Analysis, contract research and manufacturing organisations (CROs) are among those with the fastest growth in terms of number of employees and net turnover. The business segment that has seen the fastest rise in employment figures during the past ten years is that of the contract manufacturing organisations (CMOs).

SWEDEN'S BIGGEST CRO is Recipharm, which is also one of the biggest in Europe. According to Torkel Gren, the company's Science and Technology Officer, the service sector's increased growth can be attributed mainly to the fast pace of advancements in research.

"THESE RESULT IN NEW technology and new methods that can act as tools for product development. However, in every project you need access to the right expertise, technology and methods in order for a complex process such as drug development to function. Contract research enables even small and medium-sized companies to gain such access."



Photo Recipharm

The service companies enable the customers (pharma companies) to buy any services they need, and also to organise their sales structure and utilise their resources to their full potential.

"It is becoming very natural to buy R&D services today, compared with ten years ago. Even the large companies do it, says Torkel Gren.

In your experience, are pharmaceutical companies able to afford development contracts?

"I think the structure benefits the drugs companies. They would never be able to develop products without that infrastructure. Also, now you hear a lot less about companies having financing issues than you did two or three years ago."

Do you believe Sweden has a good infrastructure for drugs development?

"Yes, I do. Large sections of the development chain are present here, and the fact that they are available at close quarters is probably making things easier to handle, particularly for smaller drugs companies. We have people who understand drug development, and who are able to purchase and put together parts for an entire project. A lot of this is of course a legacy from big pharma in Sweden, but in recent years I've also noticed young people who have learnt by working in the system we have today, which shows that this is possible, although it requires that the individuals themselves are responsible for their own further training."

IN 2017, BIOPHARMACEUTICALS accounted for around 38 percent of the drugs in the research portfolios of global pharmaceutical companies, and this segment has increased heavily in recent years.

"We have seen fantastic development within biopharmaceuticals. That can easily lead to the impression that small molecule development has come to a halt," says Torkel Gren, who devotes a lot of his time to work involving small molecules.

"However, that is not the case. There is a lot of work going on based both on completely new molecules and on finding new ways of using already existing substances (new indications and methods of administration and formulation).

Although there is strong growth in biopharmaceuticals, small molecules will

continue to play an important role for a long time. They have great advantages in that they are easy to administer (orally), and they are cheap to produce and handle. "It will be a long time before we can administer biopharmaceuticals substantively in any other way than through injections."



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MOREOVER, CHEMISTRY IS EVOLVING and today there are, for instance, numerous methods for improving the solubility and dissolution rate of small molecule substances, which are common problems. Often, such methods are based on increasing the particle surface, weakening the inter-molecular bonds, or the drugs being bonded to complexes or lipid systems.

"There are many diseases, apart from the most common ones, where small molecules would be a very good complement. A lot more work remains to be done." **KB**

