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Dated: 25 August 2023

Justification for sponsoring the nomination of Dr. Pragya D. Yadav for the Sun Pharma Science Foundation Research Awards 2023

I am endorsing the nomination of Dr. Pragya Dhruv Yadav, a highly deserving female scientist from ICMR, for the prestigious Sun Pharma Science Foundation Research Awards 2023. Her notable achievements are outlined below:

Dr. Pragya Yadav holds the position of Scientist 'F' and serves as the Head of the Biosafety level-4 laboratory at ICMR-National Institute of Virology, Pune. This laboratory stands as Asia's pioneering state-of-the-art facility designed to handle high-risk pathogens. Dr. Yadav holds a pivotal role in enhancing India's preparedness to handle outbreaks of high-risk pathogens like Monkeypox, Nipah, Ebola, Zika, mPox and Crimean-Congo Hemorrhagic fever. Her track record includes the discovery of novel viruses with implications for human health, and she has spent over two decades leading a team of young researchers dedicated to infectious viral pathogens. Their primary focus encompasses early detection, containment response, one-health-based surveillance, laboratory strengthening, and capacity building. The team's rapid and efficient responses to novel virus discoveries in India underscore Dr. Yadav's significant contributions.

Her exceptional dedication and remarkable contributions during the challenging times of the COVID-19 pandemic have been truly commendable. She actively participated in providing timely diagnostic support and played a pivotal role in developing point-of-care assays, including the Anti-SARS human IgG-antibody ELISA, which gained widespread usage in the country for diagnostic purposes. Notably, her meticulous efforts resulted in confirming the first three cases and successfully isolating the SARS-CoV-2 virus. This groundbreaking isolation of SARS-CoV-2 played a crucial role in generating indigenous diagnostic kits, screening antiviral compounds, and developing an indigenous vaccine. Additionally, she played a vital role in the convalescent plasma open-label phase II multicentre randomized controlled trial and the first national-level serosurvey.

In her pursuit of India's self-reliance, Dr. Yadav led preclinical research and provided substantial support for clinical trials of the first indigenous inactivated SARS-CoV-2 vaccine, COVAXIN™, in collaboration with Bharat Biotech International Limited, Hyderabad. This significant achievement was instrumental in India's battle against the COVID-19 pandemic by immunizing the adult and adolescent population. Her efforts directly contributed to the approval and rollout of COVAXIN™ by the Government of India and its Emergency Use Listing (EUL) by the World Health Organization. Her swift response in detecting, characterizing, and isolating emerging SARS-CoV-2 variants among travelers and the community significantly aided in implementing timely actions to control transmission during various waves of the pandemic.



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Furthermore, Dr. Yadav's research on the neutralization efficacy of vaccines such as COVAXIN™, COVISHIELD™, and Sputnik, played a pivotal role in reducing vaccine hesitancy. Her work extended to assessing variant pathogenicity in hamsters and exploring therapeutic options for COVID-19, including monoclonal antibodies and preclinical studies on the ZyCO-DNA vaccine. Her relentless dedication, perseverance, and leadership skills have greatly amplified our capabilities in combating the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic.

In addition to her remarkable achievements, Dr. Yadav is recognized globally for her expertise in biosafety and biosecurity. Her representation of the country at an international level attests to her expertise.

Without a doubt, I wholeheartedly recommend Dr. Pragya D Yadav for the esteemed Sun Pharma Science Foundation Research Awards 2022. Her continuous dedication and exceptional contributions as a scientist, virologist, and biocontainment expert make her a deserving candidate. Dr. Yadav's commitment to advancing virology and promoting biosafety training for public health and virology laboratories in India is undeniable.

In my view, she is a truly deserving recipient of this award.

Thanking you.

Balram Bhargava

Yours faithfully,
Prof. Balram Bhargava