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LOCAL COMPANY PROVIDES AFFORDABLE, SAFE MEDICINES

When we stand in line at the pharmacy, we may not realize there are smaller, locally grown, pharmaceutical companies that work diligently to improve people's health and quality of life. MAGNA Pharmaceuticals, located in Bluegrass Industrial Park in Jeffersonton, is one such company.

MAGNA has been in business nearly three decades and remains committed to its charter: "to provide products that are unique, highly effective, have been proven safe for a long period, and are also inexpensive," says President and CEO Dr. Warren P. Lesser.

Not only does MAGNA have its own line of products, including over-the-counter medications for cough, cold, and allergy and a range of dietary supplements, it also works as a trade vehicle for other companies, including MainPointe Pharmaceuticals, also located in Louisville.

"We provide products that are really affordable for patients, even patients who have no insurance."

— Dr. Warren P. Lesser, Magna Pharmaceuticals

One of the products MAGNA and MainPointe are working on together is NexaFed, an abuse deterrent form of pseudoephedrine for which MainPointe owns the rights. Unlike other pseudoephedrine medications that can be used to make methamphetamines, if NexaFed is cooked down, it becomes a gel that is unusable. If DEA officials will allow NexaFed to be sold in front of the pharmacy counter, customer preferences and market dynamics will cause competitors to follow. This domino effect can result in the eradication of the societal scourge of domestic meth production. Lesser has been working with legislators, retailers, and magistrates to enable NexaFed sales in front of the pharmacy counter.

One of the challenges of the pharmaceutical industry is the changing nature of government regulations. According to Lesser, there used to be legacy drugs that were safe to use and had been used for long periods of time but had never gone through the FDA's New Drug Application (NDA) process. However, the FDA made it mandatory that all legacy drugs had to get NDA approval. "What the FDA was trying to do was level the playing field to make it fair so that every drug on the market had to go through the same rigorous testing," Lesser says.

One of these legacy drugs was guaifenesin, an expectorant that loosens mucus. A company went through the NDA trials with guaifenesin, which led to what most shoppers now recognize as Mucinex. "When Mucinex came on the market, all the other extended-release guaifenesin products out there that didn't go through Phase 1, 2, and 3 testing to prove efficacy and safety had to go off the market," Lesser says.



Dr. Warren P. Lesser, President and CEO | MAGNA Pharmaceuticals, Inc.

Photo by Erika Doll

In 2011, MAGNA lost almost every product it had in the marketplace except for one, as a result of FDA regulatory changes. Lesser says it took over five years to right the ship and get MAGNA on solid footing once again. "It was a major mid-journey correction," he says.

One of the biggest advantages of being a small pharmaceutical company are the prices it can offer patients. "We provide products that are really affordable for patients, even patients who have no insurance," Lesser says. MAGNA had a product called Zolpimist, an Ambien spray, that it sold for \$38 for 30 sprays and \$68 for 60 sprays. When MAGNA sold this product to another firm, the cost rose to over \$300 for 30 sprays and over \$600 for 60 sprays.

"We really want to help people," Lesser says. "If all we do is make money, we haven't done anything with our lives that has real value."



502.254.5552 | 888.206.5525
10801 Electron Drive, Suite 100 | Louisville, KY 40299
magnaweb.com

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