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Q&A with Bala Swaminathan, Executive VP of IHRC providing Scientific Services, Bioinformatics, Information Technologies and Workforce Development Training to the CDC and other Government Agencies supporting Disease Surveillance and Outbreak Investigations

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CEOCFO: *Dr. Swaminathan, what is the concept behind IHRC?*

Dr. Swaminathan: We started IHRC to provide scientific and information technologies and services to the federal government. I am a retiree from the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention; I worked there for twenty years. I came across problems of contractors not providing high quality services to CDC in terms of providing the right type of people to do the projects or completing the projects successfully. When I retired from CDC, I started a consulting company to basically consult with some clients both inside and outside the United States. One day one of my former colleagues at CDC called and reminded me how I used to complain about the poor performance of contractors and that I wanted to do something about that after my retirement. He asked if I was ready to do that and I told him that if I got a contract I might be able to do it. Soon, I got a very small contract for one person and that is how we got started. Our objective from day-one is to provide the best value for our customer and to keep the customer happy regardless of whether we made a profit or not. That is what has allowed us to build a tremendous reputation at CDC and other agencies. IHRC is a high-quality contractor that you can depend on to do the work and complete the project on time.

CEOCFO: *Would you give us a couple examples of engagements?*

Dr. Swaminathan: Our primary area is science and we specialize in public health. In public health, we support surveillance for various diseases, and help with outbreak investigations as they happen. Our health communicators take the information developed by epidemiologists and laboratory scientists and reformat and package it for various audiences including the congress, press, and other agencies. We have epidemiologists, laboratory scientists and health communicators, providing whatever help is needed and whatever is under contract on different projects to provide services.

CEOCFO: *Would you tell us more of the specifics?*

Dr. Swaminathan: One of the things that I can focus on is a unique feature of IHRC – we specialize in the science of bioinformatics. Bioinformatics is the application of computational and statistical approaches to solve important biological problems through the analysis of molecular sequences, such as DNA or protein. The cost of sequencing DNA and the time and effort needed for DNA sequencing have decreased significantly, making DNA sequencing commonplace these days. The instrumentation and chemistry for it has become so simplified and affordable that many laboratories can sequence genomes in a very short time. Today, we are living in the post-genomic era in which the challenge no longer lies in sequencing a genome, but rather in analyzing the massive amount of sequence information being generated and deriving useful, actionable information out of it. This is the science of bioinformatics. A few years ago, we set up a

collaboration with the Georgia Institute of Technology and formed the Applied Bioinformatics Laboratory (ABiL). This has become a huge success for IHRC in that we are not only providing analytical bioinformatics support to laboratories around the US but also training their workforce and developing their capacity that helps them in analyzing their own datasets. This has made us one of the major players in the area of bioinformatics, not only for the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), but also other government agencies and the private sector. At this time, we are providing bioinformatics services to four companies. With respect to workforce development training, we have trained public health personnel from 32 different state Health Departments and have amassed over 2,400 of in-person training hours in the process.

CEOCFO: Are you bidding on projects for these various agencies or because of your reputation are they turning to you?

Dr. Swaminathan: Going back to the history of IHRC, when we started we were a small business. My wife, Mangal Swaminathan is the president and CEO. We started the company with Mangal as the majority shareholder and that gave us an advantage that it was a woman-owned organization. We also got some special recognition from the Small Business Administration (SBA). They have a program called 8(a) Business Development program; we applied to be part of it and we were given the opportunity to participate in that program for the past nine years. Being in the 8(a) program gives you the advantage that the government can “sole source” projects to you, so we were able to go under that and get a lot of work because of our reputation as a high-quality services provider. Now we have graduated from the 8(a) program and our revenues have exceeded the threshold for what would be considered a small business. Therefore, now we have to compete with the large players like Deloitte, Northrop Grumman and others for any projects that the government wants done. Typically, a request for proposal (RFP) is issued by the government in Federal Business Opportunities; we review RFP’s find the ones that match our capabilities and then we submit a technical proposal and business proposal. If our technical proposal is acceptable, then they look at the business proposal and see if our pricing is competitive, and if both of those criteria are met, then that results in a contract award.

“We are not only providing outstanding services in science, public health, bioinformatics and information technology but also are innovating and trying to do things better than others.”- Bala Swaminathan

CEOCFO: What is your global reach?

Dr. Swaminathan: We setup an organization in Kenya called IHRC Kenya. It is not a subsidiary of IHRC. It was setup to provide assistance to the CDC operations in Kenya. CDC Kenya does a great deal of surveillance for diseases in that region in East Africa. We setup our IHRC Kenya to provide scientific technical support, not only to the CDC Kenya, but also the Ministry of Health, in tackling some of their public health problems. We have had one contract to work there and we are looking for other opportunities to expand our work in Africa.

CEOCFO: Would you tell us about ABiL?

Dr. Swaminathan: ABiL is the partnership that I mentioned before between IHRC and the Georgia Institute of Technology. We have our scientists who are experts in bioinformatics, working side-by-side with Georgia Tech scientists to provide cutting-edge bioinformatics research and training. This allows ABiL to utilize the tremendous computing power that Georgia Tech has to offer since bioinformatics is a computationally intensive science dealing with the large amounts of data. ABiL supports Georgia Tech by funding several full-time bioinformatics graduate students as well as exposing them to the current industry trends and providing them with hands-on experience.

CEOCFO: What do you understand as a company about bioinformatics and about the industry in general that less knowledgeable companies do not recognize?

Dr. Swaminathan: Bioinformatics is an essential science that is touching on all areas of modern biological research. Whether you are developing the next generation of drugs, tracking epidemiological outbreaks, performing clinical genetic testing or even developing cosmetic products, bioinformatics is involved in the process, often playing a vital role. DNA sequencing is impacting our lives in many different ways and because of that, there will be increasing demand for bioinformatics support. There is not enough bioinformatics talent at this point to support this growing need, which is why we chose to invest in this bioinformatics collaboration and it is paying off.

CEOCFO: IHRC was recognized on the Inc. 5000 list so clearly business is good. What is next for you?

Dr. Swaminathan: What is next is to keep building our bioinformatics capabilities and keep successfully competing for work. We have focused a lot on CDCs in the last eight years or so and now in order to grow our business and keep it strong, we have to move away from that single client mode and move to other clients. We are moving slowly in that direction. We now have the FDA (Food & Drug Administration) as one of our clients. We are approaching other agencies

and telling them about us and all the work that we have done. Hopefully they will be interested in us as well, so the idea is to branch out and work for many different agencies. Also, we want to compete for work in the private sector.

CEO CFO: *What, if anything, might people miss when they first take a look at IHRC?*

Dr. Swaminathan: I hope we have provided comprehensive information on our website on our various capabilities. People might miss that we are an innovative company. On our website, you will see a write-up on Fhirbird™, which is an innovative and disruptive technology. We had worked on a contract for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the area of information technology. We recognized the problems that they were having in message transport and we chose to work on that problem even after the contract work was completed. We came up with a unique solution for transporting messages regardless of the protocols that are being used in a safe and secure manner and lots of messages would be transmitted simultaneously. We have patents pending on this new technology and we are looking for partners who can help us develop this concept further for specific applications. We have applied for one other patent in the area of bioinformatics where we are able to rapidly analyze the DNA sequence information without going through a lot of the massaging that is done typically. We are not only providing outstanding services in science, public health, bioinformatics and information technology but also are innovating and trying to do things better than others.