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HSA regulatory conference under way in Singapore

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Singapore: Health Sciences Authority (HSA), which is the national regulator for health products in Singapore, inaugurated the Asia Regulatory Conference 2013 in the island nation for the first time. The conference will focus mainly on the fields of medical product development and regulations and is themed, 'Regulatory Convergence and Cooperation to Improve Access and Quality'. The conference is being held at the Raffles City Convention Center, Singapore, from January 28-30, 2013.

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The event saw over 300 participants from health authorities, pharmaceutical companies and academia from across 30 countries in the Americas, Asia and Europe, exchange their views in order to enhance patient access to new and improved medicines. The three-day conference is co-organised by the Drug Information Association (DIA) and the International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association (IFPMA).

The fact that Singapore is now ranked number one by the World Health Organisation (WHO)-Uppsala Monitoring Center in terms of the number of reported adverse events per million inhabitants, shows the robustness of the island nation's regulatory framework. It also illustrates the effectiveness of Singapore's reporting system, which allows HSA to pick up adverse drug reaction reports directly from healthcare professionals, analyse and address any drug safety issues expeditiously.

Dr Ling Su, president, DIA board of directors, while speaking about the event, said that, "This three-day conference offers a unique opportunity for key stakeholders from health authorities, local and multinational pharmaceutical companies, and clinical research to meet and exchange views, discuss topics of interest and identify focus areas for ongoing efforts to increase patient access to new and improved medicines."

He further added, "We are honoured to have Dr Amy Khor, Minister of State for Health and Manpower in Singapore, speaking at the event as well as speakers from top-level regulatory authorities in several Asian countries and leading experts in the

International Conference of Harmonisation process."

Among the key topics being covered at the conference are issues of global significance, including how regulators and industry can work together to enable faster patient access to safe and better medicine, ensuring viability of global supply chains, the importance of post-market and active surveillance, and combating the problem of counterfeit health products.

Post-market surveillance, which is a growing discipline among regulators, industry and healthcare professionals, is also a key area that is being discussed at the conference. Recent high profile cases relating to drug safety and withdrawal of blockbuster drugs, including Vioxx and Avandia, has led to extensive discussion over placing greater emphasis in this domain.

Associate professor John Lim, CEO, has, while speaking about post-market surveillance, said that, "Globally, more emphasis is being placed on post-market surveillance. This is not only due to the strain on expertise and resources to keep on building up pre-market assessment capability, but more significantly, because not every major adverse event can be averted by pre-market studies and information."

"To strengthen post market surveillance, regulators and industry should harness the power of technology to further enhance active monitoring of drug safety. In this respect, Singapore's small population size and the presence of robust health IT systems have proven advantageous," added Assistant Professor Lim.