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ASIA EDITION

Fast-tracking innovation and transformative care to patients

October 9, 2020 | News | By Hithaishi C Bhaskar

In conversation with Thomas Willemsen, Senior Vice President, Takeda Pharmaceuticals, APAC, Singapore



The present pandemic scenarios are continuing to place immense pressure on healthcare systems across Asia Pacific (APAC). Rapidly growing, aging population and surging healthcare costs, making it challenging for governments to ensure citizens receive affordable, high-quality treatment and care. There is a need to act swiftly to alleviate these challenges to prevent prolonged stress on the healthcare systems by enhancing the healthcare sustainability.

Amidst the severe burden on healthcare systems, global pharmaceutical companies like Takeda are expressing confidence to potentially transform the lives through their breakthrough innovative vaccines and medications. Takeda is focusing on value-based healthcare to deliver personalized, precise treatments aimed at improving patient outcomes, while ultimately lowering costs, to better invest in innovation and deliver impactful value to patients. **Thomas Willemsen, Senior Vice President of Takeda Pharmaceuticals, APAC, Singapore** has more to share on the Asia Pacific healthcare challenges and Takeda's upcoming ventures, especially in combating dengue and COVID-19.

- **Takeda is committed towards accelerating access to innovative medicines? Can you provide more insight on this?**

Our Access to Medicines (AtM) initiative is about radically increasing access to innovative medicines for complex and rare

diseases by mobilizing collective action to drive impact to patients. This is done through targeted partnerships that strengthen healthcare systems in a sustainable way, at every stage of the patient journey.

Through our AtM programme, we have equipped healthcare providers with diagnostic and treatment training across our therapeutic areas, and also developed collaborative financing models to ensure patients can complete their course of treatment, even when they cannot afford to pay in full. Since Takeda established these Patient Assistance Programmes in 2016, we have impacted the lives of close to 700 patients across APAC.

We are focused on long-term commitments and seek to shape the environment in these countries so that in the long-term, a sustainable reimbursement landscape that also covers complex and rare medical conditions may be possible.

- **What are Takeda's APAC R&D focus during and post-COVID era? What upcoming assets can we expect in Takeda's innovation pipeline?**

As the world's largest Asian biopharmaceutical company, we have a responsibility to help increase the amount of R&D and number of clinical trials being conducted in Asia. Our Takeda Development Centre Asia, based in Shanghai and Singapore, serves as a regional hub for clinical development. Additionally, we are also generating local data and real-world evidence post launch to facilitate access and better treatment outcomes for patients in Asia. Many of our global brands were developed with a strong focus on the US market, but we are seeing more representation of Asian patients in the development of our current pipeline, and we are optimistic that this will continue to grow. Our R&D pipeline focuses on highly innovative medicines across rare diseases, gastroenterology, neuroscience, and oncology, with targeted investments in plasma-derived therapies and vaccines.

With a sharpened portfolio focus, and the huge untapped growth potential in the APAC region, we are committed to fast-tracking innovation and transformative care in these areas to patients. Our robust R&D pipeline will allow us to continue delivering more positive impact long into the future.

Our product pipeline that is particularly relevant to Asian patients include TAK-788 for the treatment of a rare form of Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer (NSCLC) with EGFR Exon 20 Insertion Mutation – a disease that sees a higher prevalence of patients in North Asia; and TAK-003, a vaccine to protect from dengue, a healthcare burden that affects 390 million people every year with 70 per cent of the prevalence in Asia.

- **Can you elaborate more on Takeda's endeavor to tackle APAC's healthcare challenges.**

In countries with a mature, established reimbursement environment like Australia, Taiwan and Korea, fast-tracking access to our highly innovative portfolio requires that we continue to collaborate with payors on value-based access solutions. This means that we can help payors manage their limited resources by paying only for medicines that meet the desired outcome. Once launched, we also aim to enhance outcomes of our specialized treatments by additionally offering patient support services that include home-based care coordination to support adherence to treatment schedules and improve patient quality of life through education and minimization of disease burden.

In emerging markets such as The Philippines, Indonesia or Vietnam, where many communities lack adequate and affordable healthcare, we follow a two-fold strategy. First, we focus on our AtM strategy that aims to improve the diagnosis and treatment of rare diseases. Second, we focus on some of Southeast Asia's developing countries in making our new dengue vaccine available to protect people against this disease.

With plans to make available to patients 100 products across 10 APAC countries over the next five years, we are working closely with our stakeholders and customers to address unmet medical needs in the region.

- **Share Takeda's strategic partnerships with local markets to increase access to Takeda's portfolio of medicines – including immunotherapies as cancer treatment?**

We are thoroughly of the belief that we can achieve more through collaboration. In Thailand, we signed a 5-year rare disease memorandum of understanding to raise public awareness for rare diseases and drive collaboration with key government and healthcare community stakeholders in rare disease policy development. In Malaysia, we are one of five pharma MNCs to be involved in the Malaysia Cancer Care Consortium, an initiative to advance cancer care in the country.

In response to COVID-19, Takeda initiated a call for collaboration between leading plasma companies to form the CoVIg-19 Plasma Alliance. This is an unprecedented partnership of world-leading plasma companies uniting to develop a non-branded plasma-derived therapy, called a hyperimmune globulin (H-Ig), which will be one of the earliest treatment options for COVID-

19 and is currently in preparation for Phase 3 clinical trials.

- **How do you wish to execute your strategic plans to lead and transform the organization and meet patients' needs with innovation?**

Our strategy to follow the innovation with an access-first approach and patients at the center, aims to fast-track innovation and prioritize sustainable approaches, whilst focusing on lesser-known disease areas. This will enable us to invest in the discovery, development, and delivery of innovative medicines to create a positive impact on patient lives now and in the future. While innovation, science, pipelines, and financials are all crucial, the most important factor in our success will always be our people. I believe that only an organization that is aligned on the same values and trusts its leaders can transform and perform at pace. During my first year with Takeda, travelling across countries for business reviews contributed to joined visits with medical and commercial staff to meet customers, meetings with government stakeholders, internal town halls and talent roundtables. These immersions into each of the countries within our remit helped me to understand the specific opportunities and challenges and to connect to the employees at every level of the organization. We have created a high degree of transparency and employee engagement, which is also reflected through our repeated recognition as a "Top Employer" in the region. We will further execute the strategy, leverage key trends and opportunities, implement access programmes to advance our developing markets, build trust with stakeholders and continue to add value and services.

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