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Singapore's Pharmaceutical output is surging amidst the pandemic

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In conversation with Mr Jek Fong, Director, Patient Access and Personalised Healthcare, Roche Singapore



Singapore’s supportive ecosystem of government policies and processes, an excellent track record of quality and regulatory compliance, sustained investments in R&D, high-quality science infrastructure, and the country’s strategic geographical location for greater global connectivity are the major drivers towards the competitive and innovative pharmaceutical sector. The pharmaceutical sector is a strong pillar in Singapore’s economy, contributing to around 3% of Singapore’s GDP. The constantly evolving sector is reported to have produced around S$17 billion worth of products for global markets in 2017. According to market insights firm Fitch Solutions, Singapore’s healthcare market is expected to grow to US$29 billion in 2020, (a 9 percent increase from 2019), and up to US$67 billion by 2029. Biospectrum Asia had the opportunity to discuss more with **Mr Jek Fong** who is a **Director at Roche’s Patient Access and Personalised Healthcare** in Singapore

- **What are the opportunities and challenges in Singapore's Pharmaceutical market landscape?**

With strong infrastructure, policies, regulations and a multi-payer financing system, Singapore’s healthcare system is progressive and facilitates access to innovation. There are many opportunities to increase access to medicines and care such as value-based models and integration of data insights to help improve health outcomes for people who live here. We recognise that medical advances won’t be able to help people who need them if they don’t have access to them, so it is crucial for us to invest in preparing for the future today and work together to make healthcare more efficient and sustainable for future challenges while continuing to innovate and personalise care. It will take stakeholders across the healthcare ecosystem in the public and private sector, patients, caregivers, healthcare professionals and academic institutions working together toward these goals.

- **What are the potentials your company would like to explore in the Singapore pharma market?**

In recent years, there has been an increased understanding of the underlying biology of different diseases. This has led to advancements in diagnostics and therapeutics to detect, diagnose and treat patients based on the drivers of their illness and unique medical profile. We have made great progress, but there is still much to do.

Our focus at Roche is to deliver more medical benefits to society while contributing to solutions that help manage healthcare spending. We see the future of healthcare in the personalisation of care to each individual patient. This can only be achieved through deep insights on every patient and disease and applying advanced analytics to inform treatment decisions. Early detection and scientifically accurate diagnosis are essential for a well-functioning healthcare system and are key to ensuring each patient receives the care best suited for their condition. By integrating our portfolio of sophisticated diagnostics, genomic profiling, data insights and comprehensive treatments, we can partner across Singapore's data-driven healthcare ecosystem to increase opportunities to treat patients earlier, enable preventative care, avoid unnecessary therapies and contribute to learnings, all of which, we hope, will help reduce costs associated with care.

- **How do you foresee the Singapore pharma market in the post-COVID world?**

While COVID-19 has disrupted public health globally, it has made clear there are areas where healthcare systems need to be stronger and more resilient for patients and societies. The pandemic reaffirms that people continue to be affected by disease, that innovative medical research continues to be crucial, and that it is essential to ensure rapid and flexible supply and access of medicines and tests to patients across the world. COVID has also underscored a few key areas:

- **Digitalisation** holds the potential for new insights that can help discover new treatments, make smarter treatment decisions and provide better care. It can help make healthcare more efficient and reduce waste or minimise unwanted side effects of therapies. With a greater push to use digital and data-driven practices during the pandemic, there is a renewed public awareness and readiness and ability to utilise technology to help across the care continuum. The pandemic has shown us how data sharing and access across various stakeholders are important to optimising care delivery. We have seen the merits in shifting healthcare to the virtual space into the community and out of the hospital. This has included virtual consultations and the dramatic adoption of telehealth – on the R&D front, perhaps companies can look at setting up new frameworks to encourage collaboration between countries and across borders.
- **Diagnostics** will remain critical to identify and understand diseases, to understand which patients need the most care, to help limit the spread of disease, to spot early warning signs and individual risk factors and to create new opportunities for prevention and early intervention.
- **Collaboration and partnerships** are key. If we can better connect existing healthcare players and combine technologies in innovative ways, we can both sustain innovation and ensure ongoing delivery of healthcare. The pandemic has shown the need and the ability to innovate in record time, at scale, and has unleashed an unprecedented level of global collaboration and partnership - companies, regulators and governments working together closely to improve care and drive innovation.

Hithaishi C Bhaskar