

Forging a sustainable healthcare future in APAC through coordinated, equitable, and integrated efforts

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"Healthcare needs are a necessity, not an elective choice" reaffirms Jorge Sahlieh, President of International Medical Products and Distribution for Cardinal Health



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The healthcare and bioscience industry is at a critical juncture, driven by evolving challenges such as financial constraints, labor shortages, and the need for sustainable practices. Innovations in medical technology, supply chain resilience, and policy advocacy are central to addressing these issues. As the industry navigates complexities like trade tariffs, aging populations, and the demand for equitable access to care, its focus remains on improving patient outcomes, enhancing healthcare provider productivity, and optimizing efficiency. In the face of these global healthcare demands, multinational firms such as Cardinal Health strive to eliminate healthcare challenges with strategic innovations in APAC and beyond. Speaking with Biospectrum Asia, **Jorge Sahlieh, President of International Medical Products and Distribution for Cardinal Health**, discusses how key players are adapting strategies to meet these systemic challenges while fostering growth and sustainability in the healthcare sector.

- **What are the current key areas of focus for Cardinal Health in terms of innovation?**

Since last year, we have been launching new technologies in APAC and other global markets, such as introducing our next generation nutrition delivery platform in the United States and Canada and now bringing it to Asia. Our focus has been on two flagship segments: nutrition delivery and compression. In compression, we aim to prevent venous thrombosis, while in nutrition delivery we operate in the central feeding space. In our nutrition pumps, we have introduced enhancements like

connectivity to save time for healthcare professionals (HCPs), interactive features for easier training, remote monitoring capabilities, and a simplified design. On the intermittent pneumatic compression side, we have utilized new technologies to prevent venous thrombosis, while also addressing pain and swelling, further improving patient outcomes and HCP productivity.

In response to demand for sustainability solutions, we are setting up our first facility to reprocess single-use compression sleeves in APAC. Cardinal Health's investment in reprocessing capabilities for compression sleeves in Australia aims to promote sustainability, reduce costs, and enhance HCP productivity. This aligns with our strategy of driving R&D to create market-differentiating, patient-benefiting innovations that improve productivity for healthcare providers. Reprocessing has been popular in the US for some time, and we are now seeing growing enthusiasm for these solutions in Japan and other Asian markets.

- **What role do partnerships play in Cardinal Health's innovation strategy?**

Partnerships are crucial and are central to our approach to innovation. In Japan, Cardinal Health has established R&D and manufacturing capabilities tailored to local needs. We have also partnered with other organizations like the University of Osaka and ICC Corporation to launch differentiated products like the fluorescent urethral catheter for colon surgery. Similarly, we have concentrated our global product development efforts – in surgical gloves, nutrition delivery and compression – to deliver innovation that enhances safety and patient outcomes in Asia as well. These innovations are a result of combining customer understanding, R&D, technical expertise, and academic partnerships to deliver better patient outcomes.

In addition, Singapore serves as a key commercial hub for regional operations, combining supply chain, global R&D, and commercial teams in one location to leverage talent and facilitate business across Asia. Singapore's position as a gateway to Asia makes it a strategic base of operations.

Our focus is on sustainability and efficiency. We aim to assist healthcare providers overcome financial and workforce constraints. We are particularly optimistic about APAC, where a growing demand for better care quality is driving opportunities. By continuing to innovate and invest in this region, we hope to expand our impact and support the evolving needs of healthcare systems globally.

- **How do you see the impact of trade tariffs on healthcare industry operations? What is Cardinal Health's strategy as a global player to navigate through cross border complexities?**

Tariffs, like other forms of volatility, create caution in business planning because they make it harder to predict and allocate resources. From a Cardinal Health perspective, we are fortunate to have diversified our manufacturing and sourcing post-COVID. For example, we source from multiple locations globally and have manufacturing facilities in places like Mexico and Canada. This diversification helps us mitigate the impact of tariffs. While we sometimes need to pass on costs for less-differentiated products with thin margins, we are pulling every lever – such as changing shipping lanes and sourcing locations – to minimize the effect of tariffs. Our goal is to maintain a reliable supply chain without overburdening customers, especially in publicly funded healthcare systems where resources are constrained.

- **What policy changes or government support would you recommend for the Bioscience industry for equitable access of pharmaceuticals and to drive healthcare sustainability?**

Healthcare needs to be treated differently from consumer goods because it is a necessity, not an elective choice. As an industry player, I believe it is crucial for governments and policymakers to understand this distinction. Organizations like industry associations should advocate for policies that reflect the unique nature of healthcare. As an industry, our role is to ensure that policymakers are well-informed about the impact of their decisions, particularly when it comes to supply chains, quality, and regulations. Collaboration between industry players and governments is essential to create informed and effective policies.

- **In your opinion, what are the key trends and challenges observed in 2025, and how do they influence industry prospects for 2026?**

Key challenges that will persist in 2026 are the financial and labor restrictions faced by hospitals post-COVID. For example, in Japan, a shrinking workforce coupled with an aging population is putting pressure on healthcare funding. In response, we are devoting resources to better support the Japanese government's push to strengthen community healthcare in Japan to improve efficiency and reduce costs for the end user. Another example is our Valuelink® service in Canada, which optimizes hospital storage space and reduces inventory management tasks for medical staff. Solutions like these are designed to counteract the financial and labor burdens in healthcare. Moving into 2026, we continue to develop innovative solutions that address these systemic challenges while supporting sustainability and economic sustainability.

While challenges like tariffs remain, we are confident in our traction and excited about growth opportunities in APAC, where we see faster growth compared to other regions. Our investments in reprocessing facilities, new technology launches, and increased focus on the region underscore our commitment to APAC's potential.

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