

Ziena Jalil: NZ, Singapore have much to learn from each other

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New Zealand Trade and Enterprise (NZTE) is New Zealand government's national economic development agency and works to stimulate economic growth by helping to boost export earnings, strengthen regional economies and deliver economic development assistance to industries and individual businesses. Through its global network of offices, NZTE works with international businesses and investors, connecting them to New Zealand business opportunities.

Recently, New Zealand-based Orion Health was picked by the Singapore Ministry of Health to develop the country's electronic healthcare records program. New Zealand Trade Commissioner to Singapore, Ms Ziena Jalil is playing an instrumental role in connecting New Zealand and Singapore companies to develop platforms that help to manage and assist governments in planning and preparing for future disease trends. In a talk with *BioSpectrum Asia*, she shares the details about the activities going on between two countries and the impact it can have in the healthcare sector.

What are the recent initiatives taken by the trade commission in Singapore to promote life science industry of New Zealand?

New Zealand Trade and Enterprise is focused on highlighting what New Zealand industry and businesses can offer Singapore and the Asian region. We look at matching capability with needs in this region. One of our key areas of focus is healthcare and we have a number of initiatives to promote New Zealand's expertise in this industry. We play a connecting role in introducing Singaporean healthcare professionals to New Zealand government and industry leaders and allow our New Zealand companies to showcase their products and technology to the Singapore health sector.

There are a number of areas of cooperation between the two countries, particularly in the healthcare sector. New Zealand and Singapore are working together to develop a number of innovative solutions to tackle a range of healthcare and other challenges that come with fast-growing, increasingly affluent and ageing populations. For instance, scientists from the National University of Singapore and Singapore Institute of Clinical Sciences are currently working together with scientists from New Zealand's AgResearch and the University of Auckland as part of the Epigen consortium.

According to you, what are the challenges faced by New Zealand life science industry and how can they be

overcome?

New Zealand, like many other parts of the world, is facing the challenges that come with a fast-growing and ageing population. To manage these challenges, we need to innovate and look at how we can develop systems, processes and technology that allow us to continue to provide high quality healthcare, food and other essential services. Our healthcare industry, for example, has been looking at innovative solutions for decades and we introduced our National Health Index more than 20 years ago.

New Zealand has also pioneered advances in many other areas of healthcare technology, ranging from ground breaking medical devices and biopharmaceutical products to software and information technology (IT) solutions, many of which are now being adopted here in Asia. Whether it's electronic healthcare systems that can help governments plan and prepare for future disease trends or diagnostic technology that can test for multiple diseases from a single drop of blood and deliver the results via SMS within 20 minutes, New Zealand is working with Asia to develop and implement systems to manage some of our common challenges.

What can New Zealand learn from Singapore in terms of promoting the industry?

Singapore and New Zealand share a number of similarities. We are both small island nations with like sized populations that share a similar outlook on regional cooperation and free trade. Singapore and New Zealand are also building knowledge-based economies that will deliver higher value for our countries and propel us forward. This relies upon an investment in people and innovation that will help us to develop capability from our small population, respond quickly to global change and invent new ways of doing things.

It is a mindset that also relies on collaboration, looking outside our own borders to adapt and develop systems and technology that will help us to grow, and become more efficient. New Zealand businesses understand and appreciate the insight, connections and knowledge Singaporean companies have into the rest of Asia and what they can learn through partnership and collaboration.

Many prominent New Zealand companies have set up their regional operations in Singapore and are increasingly looking to Singapore and ASEAN companies as trading and joint venture partners. It is clear that New Zealand industry can learn a lot from collaboration with Singaporean partners, and give a lot back in return.

What is the size of New Zealand bio industry?

Biotechnology plays a crucial role in New Zealand's economy and New Zealand is now a world leader in niche sectors such as health research. Currently, there are more than 450 New Zealand companies involved in bioscience. Additionally, New Zealand was ranked in the top 10 countries in terms of biotechnology innovation by Scientific American Worldview in 2012.