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Clinical Research Network gives Singapore its competitive edge

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Singapore has a good track record of conducting high quality clinical trials in Asia, attributed to the highly qualified doctors and clinical trials coordinators who are trained in Good Clinical Practice (GCP). In addition, good infrastructure support like proper drugs storage facilities in the hospitals, highly educated population who understand the risk and benefits of clinical trials, as well as a small geographical country which enables good follow-up, are some of the reasons why many pharmaceutical companies chose to conduct trials in Singapore. Besides, Singapore has many world-class specialized centers which conduct top class clinical research in their area of specialty.

The government has invested in building Investigational Medicine Units (IMUs) to conduct phase I clinical trials and also in our organization, Singapore Clinical Research Institute, an academic research organization to support late phase multi-center trials within and outside Singapore. In addition, there are also Clinician Scientist Awards to fund top medical researcher in conducting research in their area of interest. Key hospitals in Singapore also have dedicated clinical research units to support clinical trials. Also, Singapore has many leading doctors who have set up clinical research networks with other doctors in the Asia Pacific region to conduct multi-center studies. For example, Singapore-based doctor, Prof Pierce Chow, has conducted a big liver cancer study across many countries in Asia through his Asia-Pacific Hepatocellular Carcinoma Trials Group (AHCC) clinical research network.

The trial assessed the effectiveness of two widely-used treatments (Sorafenib and SIRSpheres) for locally advanced hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC) or liver cancer that has not spread outside of the liver. Launched in July 2010, the trial was initiated under the Asia-Pacific Hepatocellular Carcinoma Trials Group (AHCC) and involves 28 centers in 11 countries including Korea, Hong Kong, New Zealand and Malaysia. In Singapore, we have dedicated domain specific independent ethics board in the respective public healthcare institutions which oversees the clinical research activities in their institutions. The members of these panels ensure that clinical research conducted here is of the highest ethical standard. In addition, Health Sciences Authority (HSA) also provides strong regulatory oversight in the area of clinical research.

Similar to healthcare sector, where competition abounds from neighboring countries like Thailand and Malaysia, clinical research also faces the same challenges. With their larger population and also improving quality and infrastructure, many

trials are going to these countries instead. That being said, Singapore is able to maintain a competitive edge in this sector due to a good track record of private-public partnership in research as well as our ability to collaborate with many of these countries through clinical research networks and therefore establishing ourselves as the key clinical research hub in Asia.