BioSpectrum
the business of Bio & Health Sciences
ASIA EDITION

Vela will continue its R&D work in oncology and infectious diseases'

October 21, 2014 | Influencers | By BioSpectrum Bureau



Mr Michael Tillmann has been the president and CEO of global pharmaceutical company, Roche Diagnostics, and has played leading roles in major pharmaceutical companies across the globe before he rolled up his sleeves for establishing PCR and Next-Generation Sequencing firm, Vela Diagnostics. Mr Tillman founded Vela Diagnostics in Singapore in 2011 and soon created a base of over 200 employees with operations in New Jersey, US and Hamburg, Germany.

Vela Diagnostics has developed integrated next-generation sequencing (NGS) portfolio for the detection of gene mutations with its application platform, Sentosa SQ Melanoma Panel, enabling NGS-based oncology panel for diagnostic use. The company further developed additional panels to sequence and genotype samples containing Hepatitis C virus, colorectal samples and non-small cell lung cancer samples. The technology developed is to support the clinical decisions that are based on diagnostic information at various stages of disease progression. The idea is to enable early detection of disease outcome.

In a short span of its foundation, Vela has formed partnership with Life Technologies to develop IVD tests and with Thomas Jefferson University and Hospitals to jointly develop next-generation molecular diagnostic assays for oncology and virology. In an interview with BioSpectrum Asia, Mr Tillman shares his thoughts on the trends in molecular diagnostic industry and the innovations breeding at his start-up firm.

What are the unique solutions offered by Vela Diagnostics in molecular diagnostic industry and how do you differentiate the company in the increasingly competitive market?

With more than 60 validated applications and included automation and IT interfacing with sample reporting, Vela has the most flexible PCR and NGS workflow available to date. This flexibility allows us to adapt to our customers' individual needs and improve their laboratory workflow. Including those in the pipeline, Vela will have 33 PCR and 7 NGS tests available by 2015, the broadest portfolio in the market.*

What are the new trends in molecular diagnostics that would shape the industry in next five years?

The trend certainly goes towards oncology and the automation of workflows where homebrews and lab-developed tests are currently prevalent. Uptick in adoption rate for using NGS technology for MDx, oncology, infectious diseases (virology) will make up the major segment of the NGS Dx market.

Being a recently started company, Vela Diagnostics soon got associated with global multinational companies such as Life Technologies and Swift BioSciences. Is partnership a win-win strategy for a start-up firm to scale their technologies and market?

In the Dx industry partnerships are essential. No company is able to develop hardware, software and chemistry on its own. Cross licensing deals and partnerships are very common in the Dx industry whether for start-ups or MNCs. Vela selects the right partnerships by tapping into their expertise, which will help the company to grow and expand. When the company grows, we will also help our partners to grow their business.

Ã?Â

Real time analysis is fast becoming the need of diagnostic application. How is Vela equipped with such solutions?

The doctors' demand for shorter turnaround time (TAT) is well recognized and for those tests where it gives medical advantage, Vela responded with innovative and streamlined solutions. For example, we recently launched a Direct MRSA/SA assay* that allows laboratories to report their results out in less than 90 min. In oncology, our core strength, we also constantly develop new innovative tests. In this field however, we see the trend rather going towards developing tests that give more detailed results, as can be obtained using next-generation sequencing for example.

Vela is already in partnership with some leading MNCs, what are your plans for market and product expansion?

As Dx company we understand our customers' individual needs. Hence we decided to address our customers in key markets, which are the USA, Western Europe, Singapore and Australia, with direct service and support teams. In other markets we work closely together with our partners and ensure the same Vela service and support is maintained as in own markets.

Vela will continue its R&D work in oncology and infectious diseases (virology) to focus on new medical needs and to further broaden our product portfolio in both PCR and NGS.

** Regulatory status of products is based on regional availability*