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UPS APAC director: Temperature sensitive shipment demand on rise

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Delivering pharmaceutical products to the designated market at right time and in right condition is the most critical task that any pharmaceutical company aims to accomplish. UPS has emerged as a prominent name in the complex supply chain domain of the biotech industry. It has established extensive warehousing and distribution capabilities to help biotech companies meet demands for time and temperature sensitive product deliveries.

In an interview with *BioSpectrum Asia,* Ms Lim Bee Koong, director, healthcare strategy, UPS Asia Pacific, Singapore, talks about the critical role that UPS is playing in reaching out to the ever expanding global market of pharmaceutical companies.

In the last one year, UPS has made significant expansion in Asian countries. What are the prime concerns while implementing the regulatory requirements in different countries?
UPS has been expanding its healthcare facilities in Asia. We are committed to grow our offerings to match our clients' requirements. With the opening of three new state-of-the-art facilities in Hangzhou and Shanghai in China, and in Sydney, Australia, during November 2012, the total number of dedicated healthcare facilities around the globe now tallies 36. These facilities are spread across more than half million square meters.

Throughout our years of experience of working with clients, and from our recent 'Pain in the (Supply) Chain Survey', regulatory requirements have been earmarked as one-of-the-key constraints and worries of healthcare executives. In fact, 52 percent of global executives rank increasing regulations as their top business worry, and 65 percent rank regulatory compliance as their top supply chain concern. Our strategy has been built around the implementation of global standards such that we live up to the motto: 'Drug quality sits at the heart of ensuring patient safety". This 'gold standard' approach allows us to build our capabilities to be global-local, allowing our quality assurance team to constantly monitor progress throughout the partnership with our clients.

What are the initiatives you have taken for a safe shipment of temperature sensitive drugs such as biologics?
Companies in the pharmaceutical or biotech industries have always focused on solutions and technologies that allow them to monitor and track products in the supply chain 24/7 to ensure that they are maintained in their required temperature ranges, to minimize spoilage and other disruptions during transit.

At UPS, we have developed UPS Temperature True, a service that gives companies precise, measurable operating procedures backed by dedicated support, contingency plans for unexpected situations, and web-based tracking and reporting for our clients' temperature-sensitive products.

We also offer an innovative air freight container, the PharmaPort 360, which provides an unparalleled level of shipment monitoring and product protection for temperature-sensitive pharmaceuticals such as vaccines and biologics. The PharmaPort 360 helps safeguard healthcare shipments in the supply chain by enabling near real-time monitoring and maintaining product temperatures even in extreme outside conditions. For example, products can be maintained within 2 degrees of a preset temperature of +5Ã?â?¹Ã Â¡C for more than 100 hours.

To this end, UPS Proactive Response is sophisticated service that helps ensure that temperature-sensitive products are protected at every stage of their supply chain journey. We also have global "control towers," which track and monitor the condition of temperature-sensitive products as they move around the world to give customers real-time visibility and information.

During the entire phase of drug shipment, what are the most crucial stages and how challenging it could be?
UPS has always been a trusted partner of pharma companies, working with them to resolve and overcome various challenges along the way. Few common challenges we have observed that companies are most worried about, from manufacturing to delivery is compliance, ensuring product safety and integrity, Ensuring product safety and integrity, crossing borders, efficient distribution model and supply chain efficiency. spoilage is among the key concerns during shipment.

Spoilage impacts the customer in many ways, including time lost in getting the product to the patient, the cost of replacing the product, not to mention potential business impacts such as loss of market share and impact to the company's image. UPS's Temperature True and PharmaPort 360 are therefore some the many products and services offerings that ensure minimal spoilage, optimising safety and efficiency in the supply chain.

There is a growing challenge during the stage of crossing the border. This is particularly to companies looking to expand their operations overseas. In addition to regulatory requirements, ensuring trade compliance and seamless movement through customs has become more critical. UPS has a strong network in Asia to ensure that customs procedures and flow of goods are done smoothly and efficiently. We are always ahead of regulatory requirements and changes, meaning companies can focus on their core business activities while we keep them abreast of what they need to know when it comes to compliance.

Minimizing inventory holding and reducing obsolescence maintains a company's effectiveness to reaching or expanding to new markets. UPS works closely with companies to ensure that their product gets to the right patient at the most suitable time. We have multi-client distribution facilities, where we store and distribute products from multiple customers. This means that our customers can use, and pay for, only the distribution space they need at any given time, thus allowing them to ramp inventory up and down as needed.

Using our multi-client distribution facilities, companies can also do things like expand into new markets using our existing assets and infrastructure. This strategy limits the amount of additional investments companies have to make when they move into new territories. It also lets them scale resources and people investments appropriately and effectively.

What steps can be taken by pharma companies and regulatory agencies to ensure smooth drug supply in their country?
Pharmaceutical companies can ensure smooth drug supply through consistent and efficient processes built on good distribution practice principles, good controls through technology-driven solutions to manage and track inventory and efficient and secure distribution network.

Often times, engaging a third party full service logistics partner can help offer insights and smart solutions to ensuring that the key steps mentioned above are fulfilled. As the largest logistics provider that moves two percent of the world's GDP, UPS provides a host of solutions and the network capability to handle the growing business needs of pharma companies. This allows companies to focus on what they are truly the best at, while the logistics partners can offer visibility and connectivity that can ease this decision making process.