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Ã¢â?¬Å?80% of premature heart attacks and strokes are preventableÃ¢â?¬Â•

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Widespread chronic disease and ageing populations are necessitating a pressing change in the model of care, as there will be close to half a billion people aged 65 and older in the Asia Pacific (APAC) region by 2025. In a recent chat with BioSpectrum Asia, newly appointed Bayer Pharmaceuticals Head of Commercial Operations for APAC, Dr Ying Chen shared the division's latest business results in FY 2021, her outlook for 2022, and how Bayer's pharmaceutical division is transforming itself to fuel future growth with breakthrough innovations for patient's yet unmet medical needs, as well as the company's vision for a sustainable future.



What were the key highlights at Bayer Pharma APAC in FY 21-22?

Looking back at the last decade, Bayer has grown from strength to strength, with sales nearly doubled from 3 billion Euro in 2012 to 5.8 billion Euro today, driven by innovative medicines such as Xarelto and Eylea, but also being sustained through our established portfolio including women’s healthcare.

We remain as the Top 10 leading multinational pharmaceutical companies in Asia Pacific, and we have been operating in India for over 125 years.

Despite the APAC region being only a quarter of the global pharma market, we at Bayer have almost a third of our topline coming from the region, underscoring our focus and commitment to the region.

We are extremely proud of what we have achieved through Xarelto, which is a novel oral anticoagulant that we launched more than 10 years ago, and Eylea which has been the market leader in anti-VEGF treatment with a well-established efficacy and safety profile. These have been one of the most successful launches that we have in the region including India. We have also been investing in Women's Healthcare for decades, and we are proud to see how women across the region continue to benefit from our short acting contraceptives Yaz Family and gynecology treatments like Visanne for endometriosis.

Our growth in India grew by an average of 11 per cent in 2021 and we are confident that it will keep the strong growth momentum as we continue to launch new innovative products and expand our portfolio in India.

What major plans are in store for FY 22-23 for the APAC region? How much growth are you expecting?

Bayer plans to grow its global pharmaceuticals sales by 3-4 per cent in 2022 on a currency and portfolio adjusted basis. The market outlook for the Asia Pacific region remains positive, as IQVIA projects an average growth rate of ~4 per cent in the pharmaceutical markets across the region from 2022 to 2026.

Among the APAC countries, India will continue to be an important market contributing to the region's growth in years to come, especially with the new launches expected in the country this year which will address disease burden in diabetes and cardiology.

Any investment or collaboration plans lined up within the region? Please elaborate.

Bayer heavily invests in R&D to find new compounds and molecules for difficult to treat diseases, whilst at the same time innovating across the spectrum of healthcare provision, engaging in partnerships and collaborations for prevention of disease.

In India we already have a successful joint venture partnership with Zydus for more than 10 years now. Additionally, our collaborations with key stakeholders in healthcare with partners like Federation of Obstetric and Gynaecological Societies of India (FOGSI) for women's healthcare and Arogya Finance for the patient access programme for Eylea enable us to leverage Bayer's expertise and create access to our innovative health solutions.

One local campaign in India that has seen traction over the years is Bayer's "Preserve the Uterus" campaign, in partnership with FOGSI to address the high number of uterus removal (hysterectomy) cases, even among much younger women. Since 2019, more than 3,800 healthcare practitioners have been trained through over 50 sessions to educate and address the concerns of unwarranted hysterectomies among women in India, and they in turn taught the subject to post-graduate medical students.

With Bayer's expertise in women's healthcare, the company has committed to provide 100 million women in low- and middle-income countries with access to family planning by 2030. Bayer's sustainability effort has reached 7 million women in Asia Pacific in 2021.

How is the company addressing the growing burden of chronic diseases in APAC?

The burden of cardiovascular disease is staggering in APAC. According to WHO, India reported 63 per cent of total deaths due to NCDs in 2016, of which 27 per cent were attributed to cardiovascular diseases, which also account for 45 per cent of deaths in the 40-69 year age group.

Yet, 80 per cent of premature heart attacks and strokes are preventable. Many opportunities to find and treat risk factors are missed every day.

This is where the industry plays a significant role to not only provide new treatment options to tackle cardiovascular diseases but also ensure that more people are aware of managing their risks and symptoms.

When it comes to Bayer's advantage, our strong heritage and expertise in cardiovascular disease stemmed from the invention of Aspirin over a century ago. Bayer's researchers continue to study compounds in various stages of preclinical and clinical development, which prioritises targets and pathways with the potential to impact the way that cardiovascular diseases are treated.

Understanding that the heart and the kidneys are closely linked, Bayer is working in a wide range of therapeutic areas on new treatment approaches for cardiovascular and kidney diseases with high unmet medical needs. Bayer also has over a decade of learned experience and real-world evidence with our oral novel anticoagulant, Xarelto, which is going to help us lay the foundation with more pipeline assets currently being evaluated in this area.

Are you planning to launch new products for the treatment or management of chronic diseases in the APAC market?

2022 will be a breakthrough year for Bayer's Pharmaceuticals division in Asia Pacific with three upcoming launches of innovative products in the fields of cardiovascular disease such as vericiguat for worsening heart failure, finerenone for chronic kidney disease in Type 2 diabetes and darolutamide for prostate cancer in oncology, across the APAC region with varying regulatory timelines. We are currently also working towards making these products available for patients in India.

Every year across the globe, 15 million people die before the age of 70 from chronic diseases which include cardiovascular diseases, cancers, diabetes, and obesity. Couple that with the fact that by 2050, one in four people in APAC will be over 60 years old.

India is home to nearly 40 per cent of the world's heart failure patients, yet there is poor awareness about the condition and its treatment. The available data from India heart failure registries show that patients in India are younger by 10-years, and the majority of the burden lies below 65 years of age, as compared to the patients from high-income countries.

Overall diabetes prevalence is increasing in APAC, with over 70 million people living with diabetes in India alone. One in 10 adults is living with diabetes and almost half are undiagnosed.

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