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Seeing Brilliance in APAC: Alcon's Vision Care Innovations and Eye Health Mission

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Jason Hoffe, Vice President, APAC Vision Care, Alcon "A unique perspective on unmet needs in Asia-Pacific vision care and innovations and exploring Alcon's commitment to transforming eye care across the region"



The global leader in eye care for over 75 years, **Alcon** strives to help eye care professionals strengthen their practices and serve patients better, improving visual health worldwide. Through its innovative eye care portfolios, Alcon has established operations in 56 countries and serves patients in 140 countries.

BioSpectrum Asia brings you more insights from **Vice President, APAC Vision Care, Alcon, Jason Hoffe,** responsible for driving the vision care business in the region.

- **What are some unmet needs impacting patients' eye health in APAC, and what opportunities exist for Alcon to address these issues?**

The eye health landscape in APAC has changed significantly with increased digital device use, contributing to dry eyes, eye strain, and myopia. Myopia prevalence is projected to reach 66 percent in Asia Pacific (APAC) and 65 percent in East Asia by 2050.

A key factor driving this increase is excessive screen time, particularly among the youth. While the global average daily screen time is estimated at 6 hours and 40 minutes, several APAC markets surpass this by a considerable margin. This growing screen dependency is a major contributor to the escalating eye health challenges in the region.

APAC's aging populations mean a rise in cataract incidences, a leading cause of blindness in developing countries. As life expectancy increases, so does the incidence of cataracts, placing additional strain on health systems. Access to eye care, especially in remote areas remains limited, and many people do not receive routine eye exams needed for early detection and intervention.

Alcon, with over 75 years of experience, is dedicated to addressing eye health. We offer a comprehensive portfolio in two key areas:

- The **Surgical** business, focusing on cataract, vitreoretinal, refractive, and glaucoma surgery.
- The **Vision Care**business that I am responsible for comprises contact lenses and ocular health products for dry eye and allergies.

Alcon is dedicated to addressing challenges facing eye healthcare in the APAC region by providing ongoing training and education for eye care professionals on Alcon Products, as well as technical support for customers – reinforcing its commitment to strengthening healthcare systems across the region and ensuring that patients receive the highest quality care.

- **Why do you think eye diseases are often overlooked compared to other chronic health conditions?**

Unfortunately, eye health doesn't get the same attention as conditions like heart diseases. Despite a genetic predisposition to myopia among Asians, gradual effects and acceptance of deteriorating eyesight as part of aging reduce the urgency for treatment.

Vision loss profoundly affects quality of life and has substantial economic repercussions. In 2020, an estimated $410.9 billion in global economic productivity was lost due to reduced employment among people with vision loss. Given the disproportionate burden of vision loss in the APAC, and that 90 percent of vision impairment is treatable or preventable, addressing this issue is of paramount importance.

Alcon collaborates with stakeholders across the eye health spectrum to ensure accurate diagnosis and awareness of diseases. We constantly gather feedback from our customers and innovate our products accordingly. By combining advanced solutions with educational initiatives, Alcon aims to ensure that eye health gets the attention it deserves.

- **How is Alcon adjusting its footprint in APAC to meet growing regional demand for access to better eye care?**

Alcon is well-positioned to address the growing demand for eye care in APAC through a combination of investment in innovation, local manufacturing, and educational initiatives. With a robust commitment to research and development (R&D) at a corporate level, in 2023 alone, we invested $828 million in R&D to support advancements in clinical research, optical design, material and surface chemistry, and automation, ensuring that Alcon remains at the forefront of eye care technology.

Building on these innovations, we offer a comprehensive ecosystem of connected eye care solutions for professionals, including the **Water Surface Lens (WSL) technology** designed to provide an outstanding wearing experience and address two of the biggest reasons patients drop out of lenses – poor vision and poor comfort; and **Advanced Technology Intraocular Lenses (ATIOLs)**, which help reduce post-surgery dependence on glasses.

Alcon developed a digital application, which streamlines contact lens reorders and automates patient communications, improving convenience for both patients and practitioners. The app was first rolled out in Australia in March 2024 and will continue in phases across APAC. It reflects our commitment to improving eye care access and efficiency in the region. This phased rollout ensures compliance with local regulations, further demonstrating our dedication to providing high-quality eye care solutions.

Globally, Alcon operates 17 manufacturing facilities, including locations in Malaysia, Indonesia, and two in Singapore. These state-of-the-art facilities enable Alcon to deliver high-quality, locally produced innovations such as **PRECISION1®** contact lenses, meeting the specific needs of the APAC region.

Our educational initiatives, such as the **Phaco Development (PD) program** focus on establishing sustainable cataract and patient care services in underserved communities. It has trained over 6,300 professionals globally and facilitated around 10.6 million Phaco procedures.

By combining innovation, local manufacturing, professional training, and community outreach, Alcon is bridging gaps in access to eye care and helping improve the health of individuals across APAC.

- **What more needs to be done to advocate better eye health in this region?**

Addressing the eye health challenges in the APAC region requires collaboration with all essential stakeholders, from governments, healthcare providers, industry, and patient communities. The **Alcon Experience Academy** provides world-class training for Eye Care Professionals (ECPs), including doctors, staff, and students.

Each year, we train over 1,000 doctors at our **Alcon Experience Centers** and other training facilities through in-person and remote learning, providing flexible, tailored training that addresses the unique challenges faced by eye care professionals in APAC. This approach helps build local capacity and ensures healthcare providers are equipped to effectively manage eye health within their communities.

Building on our commitment to improving eye health, we recently launched India's first **Global Center of Excellence** in partnership with Aravind Eye Care System, aimed at building local expertise and expanding its reach. Additionally, Alcon also supports underserved communities through eye screening programs in markets like Singapore, India, and Korea to identify eye health issues early, ultimately improving patient outcomes.

- **How is Alcon adapting its innovation direction and pipeline to cater for growing eye health trends across APAC?**

To address growing eye health challenges in APAC, Alcon is focusing on Digital Device Dryness. When concentrating on digital devices, people blink 60 percent less than usual causing ocular surface dryness, known as Digital Device Dryness. It brings symptoms of discomfort, redness and blurry vision which are of particular concern for contact lens wearers. Approximately 85 percent of wearers experience at least one ocular dryness-related symptom, impacting their quality of life.

Our contact lens portfolio (such as **TOTAL30®,** and **PRECISION1®**) features innovative solutions with WSL technology, aimed at helping patients combat these symptoms. In addition, Alcon offers the **Systane®** family of eye drops, commonly recommended for relief from dry eyes, especially for those suffering from digital eye strain. The drops contain **Hydroxypropyl-guar (HP-Guar®)**, which forms a gel-like mesh that adapts to the eye's pH, providing long-lasting relief of dry eye symptoms and comfort. The preservative-free **HPG-HA dual-polymer formula** effectively soothes dry eye symptoms.

Alcon's innovations are driven by our purpose to help people see brilliantly. By adapting its pipeline to meet the evolving needs of patients in APAC, Alcon ensures that eye care professionals have access to cutting-edge solutions, improving care for both digital eye strain and age-related eye health challenges.

- **What is Alcon's approach to optimizing the accuracy and efficiency of eyecare professionals be it optometrists, ophthalmologists or surgeons?**

Alcon supports ECPs by investing to advance eye care technology and provide robust training across the region.

Contact lens innovations such as the **WSL portfolio for Astigmatism** features the proven **PRECISION BALANCE 8|4®** lens design, providing a stable lens-wearing experience. This design focuses on two points of stability at 8 and 4 o'clock, minimizing interaction between the lens and the lower eyelid to enhance the fitting and wearing experience. Meanwhile, **PRECISION1®** features **SMARTSURFACE® Technology** and provides long-lasting comfort and optimal performance throughout the day. Clinical studies show that the toric lens settles in less than 60 seconds and within 3º of ideal orientation, achieving an impressive 99% first-fit success rate.

Alcon further supports ECPs with the **Alcon Vision Suite** in the surgical area; it is an integrated ecosystem of products, digital innovation, and services that enable ECPs to seamlessly power their practices.

- **How does APAC's diversity and differing healthcare needs influence how Alcon developsand delivers its products for patients and HCPs?**

The diversity of APAC populations and their unique healthcare needs influence how we innovate products. Extensive market research helps us gain insights into the specific eye health challenges faced by different communities.

Alcon offers myopia management solutions, such as the **DAILIES TOTAL1®, TOTAL30®,** and **PRECISION1®** contact lenses for countries with high incidences of myopia. Further, Alcon collaborates strongly with HCPs through **Alcon Experience Academy** to ensure effective delivery of these products.

Alcon engages with patients through awareness campaigns, educating them about eye care and the importance of regular eye examinations. In line with **Dry Eye Awareness Month**, Alcon launched an infographic in Korea linking Digital Device Dryness and the importance of blinking to intrigue patients to learn more about their own eye health management.

By tailoring our approach to meet the diverse needs of populations in the APAC region, Alcon effectively enhances patient outcomes and strengthens its commitment to improving vision care.

- **As an innovator company, what are some developments in eye healthcare that are causefor optimism for patients in the region?**

At Alcon, we are driving significant advancements in eye healthcare, and there is much to be optimistic about for patients across the region.

With a strong focus on R&D, we are expanding our **WSL** portfolio to better meet the needs of contact lens wearers, including those with astigmatism and presbyopia, where dropouts are high due to unmet needs. And we are addressing the growing concern of Digital Device Dryness in the APAC region by empowering ECPs and patients to manage digital eye strain. Our products are designed to alleviate discomfort and dryness, supporting patients in maintaining eye health despite their digital lifestyles.

Our acquisition of **Aerie Pharmaceuticals** strengthens our presence in the ophthalmic pharmaceutical sector, adding a promising pipeline for dry eye conditions. These strategic acquisitions bolster our R&D efforts and position us to meet the evolving needs of both eye care professionals and patients.

We are also committed to improving access to essential eye care for children in underserved communities through initiatives like the **Alcon Children's Vision Program.** We provide vision screenings, comprehensive eye exams, and even prescription glasses, helping thousands of children gain access to the care they need for better academic performance and overall well-being.

These innovations and initiatives reflect our commitment to improving eye health outcomes and we are dedicated to helping people of all ages see brilliantly.

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