Yuko Mizuma – GM, Hong Kong & Macau, Eli Lilly Asia, Inc.



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Yuko Mizuma, general manager of Hong Kong and Macau at Eli Lilly Asia, Inc., shares her impressions of Hong Kong's healthcare ecosystem after working in Japan and the US, discusses the local impact of obesity, which affects 33 percent of the population, and the positive reimbursement outlook for newer treatments thanks to the government's pro-active approach to healthcare reform.

Could you share your journey at Eli Lilly and Company and what has kept you at the company for so long?

I have been with Lilly for over 16 years, starting in Japan and then moving to the US before coming to Hong Kong about a year ago. My career has mainly been in commercial roles, including sales and marketing. What has kept me with Lilly is the company's strong commitment to diversity and integrity, values that resonate deeply with me. I have been fortunate to explore different markets and understand the common unmet needs we should address. This opportunity to lead in Hong Kong and address these needs excites me greatly.

How has the affiliate been performing, and what were your initial observations upon taking on this role?

Lilly Hong Kong has a robust foundation, established in 1984, with a strong presence across several therapeutic areas such as oncology, diabetes, neuroscience, and immunology. While we have made significant strides, addressing high unmet medical needs remains a primary focus globally and here in Hong Kong. The local healthcare ecosystem is sophisticated, akin to Japan, with a strong emphasis on innovation and high standards of medical practice. I have been particularly impressed by the dynamic nature of Hong Kong and the government's proactive stance in fostering an environment conducive to innovation, which aligns well with our mission and ongoing pipeline initiatives.

Lilly has been cited as the fastest-growing company in the first quarter of 2024. As someone who's been with the company for a long time, how do you see this?

It is a testament to Lilly's commitment to addressing unmet needs. Our motto, "Lilly unites caring with discovery to create medicines that make life better for people around the world," truly reflects our mission. While it might seem like we are suddenly producing many blockbusters, this success is built on decades of research and innovation. For nearly 150 years, we have been pioneers in new innovations, currently supporting over 51 million people globally with our medicines.

We are harnessing the power of biotechnology, chemistry, and genetic medicines to solve significant health challenges. We are transforming diabetes treatment, tackling obesity to prevent long-term effects, advancing in the fight against Alzheimer's disease, addressing debilitating immune system disorders, and turning the most difficult-to-treat cancers into manageable diseases. All this hard work is coming to fruition, and we remain dedicated to making new discoveries.

Although insulin has been used for over 100 years, only recently have we seen other types of solutions for diabetes emerge. What is the scope of diabetes in Hong Kong, and is there a real demand for the latest innovations?

As the innovator and manufacturer of both insulin and GLP-1, Lilly remains committed to these essential treatments. However, the unmet needs are incredibly high. Globally, every five seconds, someone dies from diabetes and its complications. This statistic underscores the significant impact

we have been discussing.

In Hong Kong, the situation is similarly pressing. One out of three people here are impacted by obesity, which equates to 33% of the population. This not only affects individual health but also accounts for 9.8% of healthcare expenditures. Obesity, which leads to over 200 complications including diabetes, is a major issue.

Despite recent innovations, the demand for advanced treatments continues to grow. Lilly is fully committed to addressing these unmet needs and combating the stigma surrounding obesity. Many still perceive obesity as a result of lifestyle choices, but science has proven otherwise. It is crucial for us to work with stakeholders to overcome these misconceptions and recognize obesity as a chronic disease requiring serious attention.

There has been little consistency globally in terms of reimbursement and access to obesity treatments, with some developed countries lagging behind. How do stakeholders in Hong Kong view this issue? Are there efforts underway to address these disparities, particularly regarding reimbursement and access to newer obesity medications?

Currently, newer medications for obesity have not been launched or reimbursed in Hong Kong. We acknowledge that there is work to be done here, similar to global trends. However, there is optimism in Hong Kong due to government-led initiatives like the Chronic Disease Co-Care Plan, focusing on early screening for conditions like diabetes and hypertension. While obesity is not yet included, the initiative underscores the government’s proactive stance in primary healthcare reform and addressing related comorbidities. This initiative has completed screening for over 21,000 citizens, revealing a higher-than-anticipated prevalence of prediabetes, diabetes, and hypertension, highlighting the scale of the health challenge.

We are actively engaging with multiple stakeholders to explore collaborative solutions to improve access to medications and address the stigma associated with obesity. We are open to leveraging effective strategies from other countries to adapt and implement them here in Hong Kong.

When discussing access to medicines, there is often a misconception that it is primarily an issue in lower-income economies. Are there access gaps in Hong Kong, particularly in areas like diabetes or oncology, despite its status as a middle to high-income economy?

Access to healthcare in Hong Kong presents challenges beyond financial considerations. While it is true that economic barriers exist, there are also issues with accessibility to care, particularly in managing overcapacity within government hospitals. This is why I support the government's focus on strengthening primary healthcare services, ensuring timely diagnosis and treatment for all patients. While financial access issues are global, Hong Kong has mechanisms in place, including partnerships with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), to support patients in need, which Lilly actively participates in.

Moving to oncology, could you elaborate on Lilly's presence and portfolio in this competitive field in Hong Kong? How does Lilly contribute to addressing challenges?

Lilly maintains a comprehensive oncology portfolio here in Hong Kong, supported by a dedicated team focused on meeting local needs. Breast cancer, in particular, is a significant concern, with approximately 15 women diagnosed daily. We are committed to providing effective solutions and supporting ongoing efforts to improve outcomes for patients facing this challenge.

What are your thoughts on the recent introduction of the 1+ regulatory pathway, and how do you perceive its impact on drug approval processes in Hong Kong?

The introduction of the 1+ pathway in Hong Kong is a positive step towards accelerating innovation and improving access to new treatments for patients. Announced last November, this pathway allows for certification based on one reference country with local clinical data, alongside efforts to establish primary evaluation capabilities. These developments offer a streamlined pathway for drug registration, which is beneficial for both pharmaceutical companies and patients alike.

While Hong Kong's regulatory environment is becoming more competitive, similar initiatives in China and Macau highlight regional efforts to expedite approvals. While we currently do not conduct clinical trials in Hong Kong, we are confident in leveraging our robust global evidence base to support registrations effectively.

Could you share the latest developments and insights into Lilly's efforts in dealing with Alzheimer's Disease, particularly regarding potential treatments that may soon be available?

Alzheimer’s disease presents a significant challenge globally, especially with aging populations like in Hong Kong, where there is a high prevalence of mild cognitive impairment and Alzheimer’s. Approximately 8.5 percent of the population experiences MCI, with 3 percent affected by mild Alzheimer’s. With Hong Kong having one of the world’s longest-living populations, timely detection and accurate diagnosis are crucial.

Lilly is excited about advancements in Alzheimer’s treatments, particularly our amyloid-targeting therapies, which aim to address the underlying causes of the disease. We are currently progressing through regulatory review.

To what extent are you already engaging with key opinion leaders and patient groups for Alzheimer’s Disease here in Hong Kong?

We are beginning to engage with the strong community of experts in Hong Kong, particularly in Alzheimer’s and dementia research. While Hong Kong faces challenges like limited PET scan capacities, we are encouraged by emerging diagnostic technologies such as blood biomarkers. These advancements can support timely diagnosis and treatment readiness in the local healthcare ecosystem. We are eager to collaborate with stakeholders to ensure these developments benefit patients effectively.

What strategies do you have in place to revitalize and streamline operations here in Hong Kong? And how would you describe the team working ethics?

Our foremost priority is accelerating our response to urgent healthcare needs and ensuring faster access to treatments for patients. Across every therapeutic area, we are deeply focused on collaborating with stakeholders to expedite our efforts. Our commitment lies in addressing the unmet needs of patients, and this patient-centric approach will guide us in leveraging partnerships and streamlining processes to achieve our goals effectively.

Our team in Hong Kong shares a strong work ethic and a meticulous attention to detail, which reflects a commitment to excellence that I have observed in other regions, including Japan. What sets Hong Kong apart, however, is its vibrant spirit of innovation. Both as a market and within our office, Hong Kong is an incubator for new ideas and approaches. This environment allows us to accelerate the adoption of medicines and challenge traditional approval processes, aligning with the government’s efforts to innovate in healthcare. It is an exciting time to harness the energy and

potential that Hong Kong offers.

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