Interview: John Tseng, President, Gene Health, Taiwan

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The President of Gene Health, a company specialized in genomics testing, talks about the current market situation for genomic testing, and building the business in the Chinese market, as well as the company' relationship with Vita Genomics.

What interested you in the genomics business, and what are your strategies for developing Gene Health?

I've noticed a trend in Taiwan: many people have begun to focus on preventive health. They are increasingly buying health foods, vitamins, and etc. The market for these products is huge in Taiwan.

I began to think that instead of purchasing such products indiscriminately, consumers would be much better off if they knew their bodies—if they knew their genetic makeup. Then they would be able to make the right choices in terms of what they personally needed. This is why I joined the genomics industry.

Currently, our strategy is to align with medical centers and hospitals, sign contracts, and build up trust. Our goal is to have doctors tell their patients about gene testing and the benefits it can have for preventing disease and managing health. We already have a number of major healthcare providers on board: names such as Taipei Medical University Hospital. Our business has increased dramatically since Angelina Jolie's well-publicized decision!

We have a number of competitors in Taiwan, but they lack our scale and breadth of services. We are now in talks with potential collaborators in China to penetrate the Mainland market. We may have our first China contracts as early as next month.

Fortunately, there is no shortage of Chinese companies that want to speak to us—after all, our competitors also lack our linkages to a great partner like Vita Genomics. Vita has data that covers the entire Chinese population! No other organization in this region has access to such an extensive dataset.

Gene Health's offering is relatively expensive today. How can you bring it to a broader audience? Can your testing services be covered by the national health insurance system one day?

Our tests are not curative, so it will be difficult to convince payers to reimburse them. But who knows—perhaps, as preventive genomic information gains traction, this can be the next step!

I should also mention that currently, the doctors we work with are happy to offer testing that falls outside of the national health insurance system, because state-reimbursed programs offer low pay. With our diagnostics, they can bring greater added value to their practice. This is one of the incentives that have many of them calling us for information.

Another way to reach more people with our offer is, after we build up our foundation, to develop single-subject tests. This way, people can screen for very specific genes, and thereby reduce their out-of-pocket expenses.

Is there any advantage to building this business from Taiwan?

Firstly, we were the first to enter the consumer genomics field in the Greater China region, so we are an early mover in a very promising market. Another advantage is Dr. Ellson Chen! Dr. Chen is the only man in this part of the world that has this level of knowledge about gene testing. Access to his lab, and partnership with his company, is a huge advantage for us.

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