P&K Skin Research Center – Kim Beom-Joon, Head Researcher – South Korea



22.12.2014

Tags: clinical trials,

The head researcher at P&K Skin Research Center discusses the potential of South Korea as a clinical trial hub, and the company's current expansion plans.

What differentiates P&K Skin from its competitors, and what are the key characteristics of the Korean market that attract foreign patients and companies?

We currently have 38 research staff, including PhDs and post-doctorates. We also currently have 40 hospital workers, which are based in clinics around the country. We are most well known for our A-Z method, meaning from bench to clinic: in other words, cooperative working. Korea has recently become a very attractive country for foreigners seeking medical and cosmetic attention, which is playing a huge role in expanding our Korean business. For example, 20 percent of the patient base in our clinics is from foreign countries. Something that has been very interesting for us is that we have been able to accumulate data for a variety of ethnic bases for different types of patents—for example, we can now begin to control aging spots and pigmentation in certain patient groups. When a certain company suggests a particular pre-clinical trial, we can even make our database available to them.

Our topical products can be very costly, which means that when a certain product or agent has been created and sympathized, we first do in vitro animal studies and then directly go to cosmetic

trials. Once some of the functions have been proven, only then does it go to medical trials. Every step is performed in a single clinic. One of the key features of our clinics is that we perform radio frequency with lasers, LED, full spectrum light trials, UV phototherapy, magnetic resonances as well as high-intensity focused ultrasound. All of these different subjects are performed in a single laboratory. We also focus on creating new devices—for example, the AGNES Radiofrequency anti-wrinkle and acne device, which was launched three months ago, has been sold for more than 400 machines.

Korea is starting to become a hub for clinical trials. Combined with the fact that medical tourism is outpacing regular tourism, what is the macroeconomic impact of this?

Many foreign companies are coming to Korea with the thought that Korea is a suitable test market for clinical and pre-clinical trials. Size-wise, the Korean test market is larger than Hong Kong, for example, so it’s more suitable. In addition to this however, the Korean population are not hesitant in expressing their opinions about new products, and the response time is very quick. This may seem like a small detail, but it’s quite important in terms of feedback. For example, in Japan where they have recently performed some pre-clinical trials, there was some hesitancy to expressing feedback, especially when it was a complaint.

Another positive factor is that one single medical system covers the entire population of Korean people, which is absurd because we have limited natural resources. This means that the average benefit needs to be reduced, because we have to share a limited amount of resources. Many hospitals suffer greatly because of this, especially when it comes to financial support. This is also one reason why there is an increased interest in private healthcare systems at many hospitals.

What are the research activities that P&K Skin is currently involved in, and how do you see the company expanding in the next five years?

Our medical devices are growing very quickly; unlike medicine, medical devices take only one or two years to develop. Our hospital is currently performing research on new medical devices and new medicine; unfortunately, if our company wants to conduct clinical trials in a hospital however, it’s very difficult to pay the whole process because usually a cosmetic company, for example, wants to pay very little money to conduct extensive clinical trials. Our initial clinical trials were conducted in the area of cosmetics but we are now expanding to textiles—for example, UV protective golfwear. From there, we hope to further expand into nutrition in the near future.

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