Interview: Ricky Teo – Senior Area Director, South Asia, LEO Pharma

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LEO Pharma's senior area director for South Asia, Ricky Teo, explains the company's strategy for obtaining growth within such a heterogeneous region and showcases how the organization's commitment to healthier skin goes beyond commercial prospects and into fundamentally understanding patient mindsets.

How would you describe the essence of LEO Pharma's business model? And strategically, how has it fared when it comes to markets across South Asia?

LEO Pharma has been present in the majority of South Asia for more than a decade, with Malaysia, Thailand, and Philippines at the forefront of our longstanding history in this region.

But, in line with our global expansion initiatives, we've also recently opened new offices in Vietnam and Indonesia.

How do you go about keeping up with the particularities of each market considering the widespread level of diversity inherent from country to country?

In my opinion it is really important to be on the ground in order to truly understand the market and anticipate imminent changes. We get a lot of market insights from our teams, but also from our distribution partners Based on those insights, we are able to articulate localized strategies and even experience growth in mature markets such as Malaysia, where we have grown by 43 percent

from 2013 to 2016. Nevertheless, local competency and efficiency is really important to achieve such growth rates—making sure that the organization is able to get more by expending less.

What are the added-value benefits that LEO Pharma derives from using Singapore as its regional HQ?

One of the primary reasons underlying our decision has been the business-friendly environment, imposed in large part by the extremely business-savvy and forward-thinking government. Additionally, the level of high-caliber talent coming out of this country is simply unparalleled. That's not to say that other neighboring countries within region don't have any; we are also bringing people from other regions to work here too. But I believe that Singapore will continue to play a critical role, at least in the region, particularly for the expertise and innovations that we cannot find elsewhere. So, if you are asking infrastructure-wise or people-wise, we still think that Singapore will be the place for companies to base their regional operations in the foreseeable future.

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In December 2014, LEO Pharma unveiled the helping SARAH campaign, an ambitious journey to help 100 million people as healthy as by 2020. To what extent is this region an important factor in enabling that vision?

In my opinion, no company can deny the fact that Asia has the largest population of patients compared to any other region or rather the biggest potential of leveraging LEO's therapies to address unmet needs—particularly in widely population countries such as the Philippines and Indonesia, In terms of how we're contributing to the company's commercial footprint, we exhibit tremendous growth prospects projecting strong double-digit rates up , compared to the low single digits benchmarked in our traditional ethical pharma markets within the region.

South Asia though fragmented and with an ever-changing policy environment. I still hold positive forecasts, particularly with the region's burgeoning middle class and increasing standards of living fuelling desire for better healthcare

How is LEO Pharma effectively helping to tackle the growing burden of skin diseases in South Asia?

The prevalence of skin disease in Southeast Asian countries varies depending on each disease. For example, the prevalence of psoriasis in the region is about 0.5 to 1 percent, which is not any bigger than Europe; But, LEO Pharma finds its core competencies in this particularly skin disease, offering a best-in-class portfolio of topical treatments, which will be further enhanced by the recent

partnership with AstraZeneca on the biologics front. Therefore, LEO Pharma is probably the only dermatology company providing systemic and topical treatment options for psoriasis treatments.

With the AstraZeneca partnership, LEO will also have a IL-13 candidate which help reinforce our portfolio in the area of atopic dermatitis. In this region, perhaps as consequence of the environment, stress levels, and associated allergies, we actually see much higher prevalence of, and in turn, growth potential for the eczema area.

Additionally, we recently acquire Astellas' global dermatology business, which includes their flagship product Protopic®—a non-steroid topical ointment used for the treatment of atopic dermatitis. This particular product, combined our with our mainstay brand Fucicort® and also the bacterial skin infection agent Fucidin®, will contribute immensely to our growth potential in South Asia moving forward..

Given the more developing nature of this region's regulatory frameworks, what challenges have you experienced with respect to market access?

Compared to healthcare systems across places like Taiwan or South Korea, market access actually isn't as pervasive of a challenge. That being said, however, I do see health economics and overall demonstrating the value of your product in the face of regulators and decision makers alike as an imperative. This is especially true when you are engaging with institutions where the governments are paying or reimbursing a portion of the drugs, such as in Hong Kong, Malaysia, Thailand, and even Singapore. Such a value-based approach—emphasizing both clinical and economic outcomes—ultimately determines whether or not your drugs are on the National Essential Drugs List.

In your experience, how have Asian cultural values fed into the way people perceive or address skin diseases here?

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Using psoriasis as an example, people suffering from this particular skin disease are typically affected the most psychologically speaking, often diminishing their quality of life. And this applies across all cultures because how a patient is viewed upon by society is the same in Europe or perhaps even worse in Asia, where a lack of education and awareness may lead people to misconstrue a skin condition for some sort of infectious disease.

For patients, managing chronic skin conditions is more often than not about going through the actual process of receiving medical attention than the treatment itself. Do you go to the pharmacy

first? Do you ask someone that you already know? Or do you go to a doctor that is well trained? And the ability to effectively diagnose skin diseases actually differs across many markets, particularly in countries such as Indonesia or Malaysia that have not reached a critical mass of qualified dermatologists.

And also in terms of doctor visits, even in developed markets like Hong Kong, the time taken to secure a visit to dermatologist in the reimbursable channel is quite significant. So, medical practitioners and community stakeholders alike need to consider a myriad of variables that go far beyond the surface of the skin before they can truly help patients cope.

What is the company doing then to put a greater spotlight on the recognition, prevention, and treatment of skin diseases?

We try to partner with local institutions and patients groups in order to educate the society about skin diseases. In this regard, we are working closely with local patient associations such as PsorPhil in Philippines and Singapore Psoriasis Association to establish patients' engagement programs.

Even internally, we focus on motivating our people to make them understand the high value of their job considering the impact that they are creating for patients. During our national sales conference, we brought in patients share their stores with our sales reps to make them not only see, but more importantly feel the psychological impact of what the patients and even their respective caregivers go through.

During your tenure as senior area director for South Asia, what objectives will occupy the majority of your strategic focus in the next three to five years?

Putting the spotlight on the coming years, growth in the emerging markets such as India, Indonesia, Philippines and IndoChina is definitely a huge consideration factor. As a company, we'll have to start asking ourselves how we're going to reinvent our business models to introduce increasing levels of innovative therapies into these frontier markets—so that's certainly an exciting development I look forward to.

Aside from that however, I want to continue attracting the right kind of talent, while also developing people within the organization to help fulfill our aspirations of reaching 100 + million patients globally.

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