

Wong Kin Sang - Country Manager, Lundbeck Malaysia



The stigma around mental health is an ongoing issue which is not easy to overcome

26.11.2018

Tags: [Malaysia](#), [Mental Health](#), [Lundbeck](#)

Wong Kin Sang, country manager of Lundbeck Malaysia, walks us through the mental health issues' perception in Malaysia and the important work Lundbeck has done to bring more awareness to healthcare professionals and patients in the country. He also highlights his future plans for the affiliate to bring more innovative solutions to patients.

Between 2014 and 2018, Lundbeck went through a global restructuring, how has this affected the Malaysian affiliate?

Lundbeck went through some restructuring driven by the ever-challenging healthcare environment changes in Europe. In Malaysia, it has not impacted us as much as we are still a growing affiliate, but we did feel the impact regarding funding, thus we had to be smarter in the way we do business. Since the last time we met in 2014, we launched two new products in the Malaysian market. We have been growing steadily with these new product launches, which helped boost our capability. Malaysia may not be the biggest market for Lundbeck, but she contributes substantially to the regional SEA market. Of course, our main business is in the anti-depressive segment. Indeed, there are more cases of depression, and this illness is not as stigmatized as schizophrenia. Our business ratio between the private and public sector is 60/40.

How has the stigma around mental illness evolved over the years?

The present government is trying to increase the awareness of mental health. Numerous papers and write-ups have come up and the stigma around mental health is an ongoing issue which is not easy to overcome. For example, the public is more receptive to depression, but other areas like schizophrenia remain very taboo. Treating depression is also much easier than treating schizophrenia and a lot of patients started treatment for depression will stay on it longer and can recover. However, for schizophrenia, because of the drug itself and the symptoms of the disease, patients tend to stop treatment once symptoms are gone, but the condition will come back, and the next attack will be harder to treat.

In this context, Lundbeck has not reached his target yet as we don't have the resources to go directly to the public and educate them on how to treat mental health diseases. We are still training doctors and young psychiatric students about the illnesses through the organisation of events and workshops to help them improve their skills. The month of October coinciding with the World Mental Health month, we have been going to raise awareness on this issue.

How would you assess the registration process for mental health treatments?

After the registration with the NPRA, there are not much entry barriers in the private sector as long as doctors are convinced by your drugs and ready to prescribe it, and patients are ready to pay for it. Pharmacy Department of the NPRA is coordinating the national formulary enlistment process and the process is now more systematic. The application dossier has to be accompanied with analysis such as the budget impact and cost efficiency of the product. On our part and for the benefits of the people suffering from mental disorders we will try to get new drug available to the formulary so doctors in public hospitals are able to prescribe it.

What is the Malaysian affiliate focusing on in the market?

Lundbeck wants to focus on the patients' mental health wellbeing and to ensure they are able to get back to their normal functioning life even if they are depressed or having schizophrenia. Our true focus is to help patients getting back their functionality through the proper use of medical drugs. We always put the patient as our main mission.

At the moment, there is not many CNS company in Malaysia, and Lundbeck is the leader in the world for this segment. Several multinationals used to have products for schizophrenia and depression, but they have since changed their focus. However, since 2014, we are encountering

more competitions from the generic side and the Malaysian government is encouraging generics solutions to manage the ever-increasing healthcare budget. It makes it more difficult for us to compete in the public sector and especially in tenders. Therefore, we need to focus on the private sector and unique products to grow the business. Lundbeck only focuses on specific groups of doctors. We don't have a big team; hence we have to target the right market and the right clinics.

Where do you see the next opportunities for growth in Malaysia and what are your main priorities for the affiliate?

The stigma on Mental Health is still present but it is getting better as every day more people are participating in awareness campaigns and being more receptive to the illnesses, resulting in more patients coming to receive treatments. We are encouraging doctors to support their patients and advise them to stay on the treatment for longer periods of time in order to avoid falling deeper into the disease the next time.

In Lundbeck, we have a lot of products in the pipeline and we have already submitted registration for one more product that should be available in two years' time. The next coming years are going to be very busy, and the future is looking bright with the new launches to come. That is why one of my main priorities is to make all Lundbeck drugs available to all public and private sectors in Malaysia so that more patients can benefit from it. I would also like to see the team grow and evolve in the mental health space. Lundbeck Malaysia in partnership with the healthcare professionals we would like to be able to help restore and improve the quality of life of those who are suffering from psychiatric and neurological disorders thus gaining back their valuable life.

[See more interviews](#)