Nic Horridge – President, Roche Korea



Roche and healthcare authorities are philosophically aligned as we share the same concern: bringing the most benefit to the patients we serve. Thus, our main imperative is demonstrating the benefit and value of our drugs

22.04.2019

Tags: Korea, Strategy, Roche, Market Access

Nic Horridge was recently appointed president of Roche Korea, having spent an extended period in emerging Asian markets. He shares his vision for the Korean affiliate, focused on bringing Roche's extensive global pipeline of innovative medicines to Korean patients, making personalized healthcare a reality in clinics and championing Korea as a global R&D site at the global level.

Having previously led Roche Pharmaceuticals' operations in Vietnam, what were your main priorities upon taking over as president of Roche Korea?

As a newcomer in the land of the morning calm, the last few months have been an interesting learning experience. I have focused on trying to understand the local market dynamics, establishing connections with key stakeholders, and building trust with the local team. We are in the process of establishing a business strategy together with the leadership team in order to provide access to healthcare solutions for patients more quickly.

How is the affiliate positioned in South Korea?

Our affiliate is very successful here in Korea and Roche's global business is well mirrored in here as almost all our portfolio is represented here. Moreover, we are the leader in the oncology market, both globally and in Korea.

How would you assess the approach of Korean regulators and payers with regards to market access, pricing and reimbursement of innovative drugs?

Roche and healthcare authorities are philosophically aligned as we share the same concern: bringing the most benefit to the patients we serve. Thus, our main imperative is demonstrating the benefit and value of our drugs. We also invest significantly in local R&D capabilities to show the government our involvement in the Korean innovation infrastructure.

We actively pursue reimbursement from day one after receiving approval, which usually takes a minimum of one year, and move as fast as the local process allows. Regarding prices, we feel the reward for innovation could be improved: pharmaceutical prices for innovative medicines in Korea fall average around 60-70 percent of the OECD average. This is an issue because Korea is a well-developed country with a strong GDP. Obviously, low prices are an issue for all companies. Therefore, it is crucial to engage in constructive discussions between the industry and health authorities, putting patients' interests first and ensuring we have a sustainable model in Korea.

Korea ranks 6th in the world for clinical trials. How important is Korea in Roche's global clinical trial footprint?

Roche has a strong clinical presence here: Korea ranks in our top 10 in the number of clinical trials and patients enrolled at the group level. To date, we have carried out more than 100 clinical trials in Korea in which about 6,000 patients have participated, including early-phase clinical trials. In fact, Roche was among the first multinational groups to take advantage of the country's excellent clinical infrastructure by participating in Phase I clinical trials for new drug candidates here. I personally started my career as a scientist, so R&D is an area that is dear to my heart. Our ambition is to champion Korea as a top global clinical trial centre for Roche and expand our R&D footprint in Korea. At the same time, we also need to be mindful of the challenges, mainly in increasing costs and bureaucratic red tape.

In March, Roche Korea received approval for its combination therapy Tecentriq and Avastin as a first-line treatment for metastatic non-squamous non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC). How was the market access journey for this ground-breaking treatment?

We are incredibly excited to have received registration for this combination therapy because patients with metastatic non-squamous NSCLC do not have access to alternative treatment options. We currently are working with our regulator to bring Tecentriq to further lung cancer populations and moving into triple negative breast cancer, if approved, these new areas will be the first time immunocancer therapy that will be available for these patients in Korea.

These filings demonstrate Roche's commitment to bringing innovative solutions for unmet medical needs. Of course, our next task is to work proactively with the Korean government to help ensure these drugs can be listed for national reimbursement so that more patients here in Korea can ultimately benefit.

Roche is facing increased competition from Korean biosimilars. In Korea, sales of Herceptin have suffered a steep decline after Celltrion and Samsung Bioepis introduced their versions of the drug. How is Roche dealing with competition from biosimilars?

First of all, competition is a natural part of doing business and Roche has been expecting and preparing for the introduction of similar versions of our biologic molecules for many years.

We have two core strategies to solve this business challenge. The first is to not dwell on the past- by continuously developing new, more effective treatments and bringing them to patients. For example, in breast cancer, we have launched Perjeta and Kadcyla to either combine with or replace Herceptin as more effective treatment options in certain settings. Roche currently has more than 20 compounds in its late-stage pipeline that we expect to launch globally over the next three to five years. Many of these will be introduced in Korea. For example, in oncology, we are developing many new treatments in breast, liver and lung cancers, several haematological malignancies and rare tumours. The second is to enhance the convenience of our existing therapies by ensuring availability and introducing sophisticated formulations with improved delivery methods. For instance, we have introduced subcutaneous formulations for MabThera and Herceptin which enhance patient convenience and potentially quality of life and save significant time and money in the hospital infusion suites.

When we met with Hong Chow of Roche China, she emphasized that "for personalized healthcare to become a reality in China, it needs joint efforts from the industry, healthcare institutions and the government". What is the situation in that regard in

South Korea?

Standard molecular biomarker testing is available in most developed countries. This is also the case in South Korea where there is a clear pathway for registration of biomarkers. Our ambition is to take personalized healthcare to the next level in South Korea. The government wants to bring about a data-driven 4th industrial revolution, and part of that is the convergence between IT and healthcare. Roche is very well-positioned to ride this next wave by utilizing data to inform clinical decisions. For instance, in oncology, patients' tumours can have their DNA sequenced in order to understand the drivers of growth and ultimately inform treatment solutions specifically tailored to them.

One of our priorities is to work in partnership with hospitals and the healthcare system at large to help make this molecular-based decision-making a reality in the clinic. That is where we see the future of personalized healthcare. We are still in the early days, but we see a strong enthusiasm from healthcare professionals with whom our team engages on a daily basis. However, there are some regulatory constraints restricting the possibility to truly use data to inform clinical decisions. One of our roles is to be an opinion leader and bring all key stakeholders together in order to think about the best policies needed to bring next-generation treatments for patients.

As CEO Severin Schwan says, "as proud as we are of past and present achievements, what really excites us is the future". What excites you most about the future of Roche Korea?

First, I want to continue building Roche's reputation as a great place to work. In 2017, Roche Korea ranked in the top ten among Aon Hewitt's list of Best Employers. This year we were recognized as a great place to work in Asia by the GPTW, the only pharma company to be so recognized. As most of us spend significant time working, I feel that it is fundamental that we feel energized and engaged with our work.

The second thing I am excited about is bringing our pipeline to Korea. We plan to launch new treatments not only in oncology but also in disease areas where Roche is entering such as inflammation, ophthalmology and rare diseases. In cancer immunotherapy, we will expand our therapies with potentially 20 new indications. We also have our next-generation treatment for influenza that we hope to launch in the very near future. Bringing this extensive pipeline to Korea is a wonderful opportunity and a nice challenge to have!

Thirdly, I am excited about the potential to make Personalized Healthcare a reality in Korea by supporting molecular-based decision-making in the clinic. Truly tailoring treatments to patients will not only enable doctors to treat patients more effectively but should also provide the government with the best value for their healthcare spending.

Finally, I would like to further leverage Korea's outstanding clinical infrastructure by expanding our local R&D footprint and contribute to the growth of Korea's research capabilities.

After more than 20 years working in the Pharma industry, what gets you out of bed every morning?

The reason I love working for Roche is that our company is completely committed to "doing now what patients need next", for us these are not just nice words, but a commitment that guides us and one by which we all live by at Roche. What gets me out of bed every morning is the privilege of being able to contribute to this promise in real, tangible ways every day on the ground here in Korea.

See more interviews