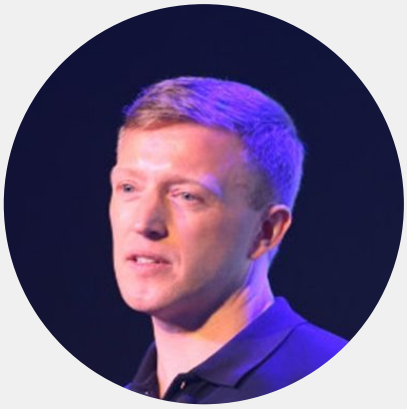
Armin Wiesler – General Manager & Head of Human Pharma. Boehringer Ingelheim Thailand



The pharma industry in Thailand is very dynamic and often changes come at very short notice

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Dr Armin Wiesler, general manager and head of Human Pharma at Boehringer Ingelheim (Thai) Ltd., explores how the affiliate has managed to achieve market-leading growth rates and addressed the challenges and opportunities inherent in the Thai pharma market for Boehringer Ingelheim.

Having been in position since August 2016, what you would identify as the main characteristics of the Thai pharmaceutical market?

Thailand is a highly dynamic market providing both significant opportunities but also challenges. For the pharmaceutical industry overall, the last few years have been difficult due to a number of cost-containment measures that led to declining industry sales. However, there are significant differences between individual pharmaceutical companies, to a large degree driven by their product portfolios.

The healthcare system in Thailand offers a high-quality hospital infrastructure with highly skilled healthcare providers. Its universal healthcare coverage (UHC) provides medical services and medicines to all Thai patients. Thailand is an international medical hub that offers state of the art medical care and the newest medical innovations. The hospital infrastructure and national initiatives suggest a strong potential for Thailand to be a leader in conducting clinical trials in the

region. In the regulatory environment, important steps have already been taken to support innovative medicines. The recent Thai FDA reform has led to significantly faster approval timelines for pharmaceuticals. Thanks to these reforms, pharmaceutical companies have been able to launch new medications more quickly so that patients can benefit.

To what extent does the fact that Thailand has universal health coverage act as a growth driver for the Thai pharma market?

Growth in the Thai pharma market is driven both by the public and the private hospital sector. As mentioned earlier, Thailand's role as an international medical hub as well as the increasing middle class strengthens the growth of the private segment.

For the public sector, Thailand's universal health system covers the entire population which is fantastic for patients and unique in the region. However, adding new medicines to the universal health system can take many years and there is no certainty that they will be added. A number of factors such as unmet medical needs, cost-effectiveness and budget impact are considered during the assessment process. Access to innovative medications is a critical element to improve the quality of a patient's life and public health, so close collaboration between the respective government agencies and pharmaceutical industry will continue to play a key role to further increase access for patients.

How strategic is the Thai market within the ASEAN region for Boehringer Ingelheim?

Our regional operations unit is called ROPU SEASK (Regional Operating Unit, South East Asia and South Korea) and comprises South Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar.

Within our region, following South Korea, Thailand is the second-largest market. Thailand is a growth driver for Boehringer Ingelheim in this region and a strategically important market. We have launched a number of innovative medications over the last years. Our portfolio of medications is young and spans across a number of diseases where the unmet medical need is high and where patient numbers are growing strongly. These diseases include diabetes, stroke prevention and treatment, respiratory diseases and oncology.

What did you establish as your strategic priorities when taking over three years ago and how much progress has been made thus far?

Boehringer Ingelheim is committed to improving human and animal health. Both businesses in Thailand are important for Boehringer Ingelheim. For Human Pharma, we need to ensure that patients can benefit from our innovative medications, so access is a key topic. Moreover, it has been critical to launch new products successfully. Like in any market there are specific success factors that need to be addressed. Thailand is a hospital market with hospital-by-hospital formularies, so ensuring fast listing in the key hospitals and informing providers is critical. Of course, people are always key to success, so a continued strong people focus has also been very important.

In our Animal Health business, the strategic priority has been successful integration. In January 2017, Boehringer Ingelheim acquired Merial and is now one leading Animal Health company in Thailand. Successful integration of both companies, combining our forces under the theme “1 with the power of 2” has been a key focus as well.

Regarding your portfolio, what will be the areas that will drive the affiliate’s future growth?

In Thailand, our portfolio is growing in all therapeutic areas that we are focused on and that I mentioned earlier. However, the main growth driver for us is our diabetes portfolio. Already today there are more than four million people living with diabetes in Thailand and the number of patients is growing significantly. We have a leading and innovative portfolio in diabetes addressing, unmet medical needs and helping patients with Diabetes.

In more general terms, Boehringer Ingelheim as a family-owned company has a long-term perspective and plans in generations. The company consistently invests heavily in R&D, for example in areas such as heart failure, respiratory diseases, immunology and oncology. We believe that once these products are successfully launched on the global stage over the next years, we will be able to successfully introduce them here as well to help patients in Thailand.

Boehringer Ingelheim is one of the world’s Top 20 pharmaceutical companies. Where does the Thai affiliate stand in comparison and how do you gain market share?

According to a recent IQVIA ranking, Boehringer Ingelheim is now ranked number 14 in Thailand on an annual basis, in the latest quarter even number 12, so that we are now getting closer to the Top 10. Over the last few years, we have made significant progress, doubled our market share and have been consistently one of the fastest-growing pharma companies in Thailand. The Thai affiliate's market share is now higher than that of Boehringer Ingelheim's global average.

I am convinced that this success in the Thailand market shows that we have strong fundamentals. We are focused on the two Ps: Products and People. We have innovative products, which are addressing unmet medical needs and thus helping patients. And we have a strong team of talented people on board.

We pay particular focus to actively developing and supporting our employees. We have recently been certified Top Employer 2019 in Thailand and also in the Asia Pacific region. We are proud of this recognition of excellence which is a strong motivation for us. We will continue to work to become even better as a great place to work in Thailand.

Boehringer Ingelheim holds global leadership in various strategic therapeutic areas, how do you make sure the Thai ecosystem also benefits from this expertise through local partnerships and investments?

We have increased our investments in Thailand significantly over the last years and continue to hire new employees. Moreover, we are running multiple clinical trials in Thailand given the excellent hospital infrastructure and highly skilled healthcare providers.

Beyond that, we have launched a number of initiatives to ensure that patients and other stakeholders in Thailand can benefit from our global capabilities and expertise. Let me give you some examples that go beyond medications, such as the ANGELs Initiative.

Every 30 minutes, a stroke patient, who could have been saved, dies or is permanently disabled because they were treated in the wrong hospital. Boehringer Ingelheim supports the ANGELs Initiative with the ambition of "giving life a chance". The objective is to increase the number of patients treated in stroke ready hospitals and to optimize the quality of treatment in all existing stroke centres. Thailand is leading in the South East Asia region in terms of stroke treatments and the ANGELs initiative supports Thailand to become even stronger. Within this region, Thailand was the first country to launch the ANGELs Initiative, and in the meantime, there are more than 167 hospitals registered in this initiative.

Another example is in the area of diabetes. Diabetes is a major health issue in Thailand and the number of Diabetes patients is growing rapidly. There are more than 200 deaths each day due to diabetes and related disease complications. People with diabetes are two to four times more likely to develop cardiovascular disease, which is the number one cause of death for diabetics. Many patients are not aware of this critical link between diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. We just launched a campaign in collaboration with the Diabetes Association of Thailand called For Your Sweetheart, to raise awareness of this link and to ensure that people with Diabetes know their risks and speak to their doctors about it. The starting video of the campaign has received more than 4 million views within just a few weeks, showing the importance of this initiative.

If I may, let me add one highly important example, this one from Animal Health. African Swine Fever (ASF) is a virus that is safe for humans, but deadly for pigs and currently a major challenge in many Asian countries, including China and Vietnam. In Thailand, the government, as well as farmers, have taken comprehensive measures to prevent the outbreak of ASF in Thailand. Boehringer Ingelheim is supporting this through its ASF Combat, a fast and easy digital tool that helps farmers improve biosecurity by assessing risk levels of introducing ASF into their farms. While of course, the intention is not to replace the advice of veterinarians or health authorities, the purpose of this tool is to assist in identifying potential areas for improvement.

Beyond that, we are supporting a number of local projects, such as the “Read for Thais Campaign” of The Mirror Foundation where books and magazines are being collected and donated to benefit under-privileged provincial children and schools nationwide.

What advice would you give to a recent international appointee to a pharma country manager position in Thailand?

First of all, Thailand is a wonderful country to live and to work in. The pharma industry in Thailand is very dynamic and often changes come at very short notice. For a leader to be successful, it is critical to be agile and stay optimistic in order to fully leverage all the opportunities present in Thailand.

What are the main objectives you want to achieve before the end of your tenure for it to be considered a success?

Thailand is an important market for us and a growth driver within our region. As a company we have a long-term commitment to Thailand, we have been present in Thailand for more than 50 years.

We are investing heavily in Thailand in both our businesses and our clinical trials and will continue to do so. Bringing innovative medicines to Thailand and providing access to patients in Thailand remains critical, so continuing our success in launching new products and expanding patients' access for our products in the universal healthcare scheme will remain a key task for my team and I. Beyond that we will continue to focus on our people and our ambition of creating a workplace of choice in the pharmaceutical industry in Thailand.

I am confident that we can continue the success story that we have built over the last few years, and continue to grow at market-leading rates thanks to our innovative portfolio that provides benefits to patients and thanks to our great team.

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