Kris Sisneros – Managing Director, Merck Thailand



Every year in Thailand we treat more than 466,000 patients with our general medicine portfolio

18.09.2019

Tags: Thailand, Strategy, Merck

Kris Sisneros, managing director of Merck Thailand highlights the importance of going beyond therapeutic areas and caring about the Thai people, the patient and the people in the company. He offers insights into the strength of Merck Thailand within the Thai health ecosystem.

What would you highlight as the key qualities that you have acquired that will help you lead Merck Thailand?

I strongly believe that diversity of experience has been a key to my success and what I can share with my team members as well as serving our patients here in Thailand. I was born and raised in Japan and studied at an international school to ultimately attend and graduate from university in the United States. My background is in finance and at the beginning of my career, a member of my family became ill and I found an interest in healthcare. I had never previously thought of working in the healthcare industry so I became very interested in the idea of meeting patients' unmet medical needs.

I always knew that I would come back to the Asia-Pacific region and that it would be the perfect place for me to contribute back to where I started, beginning with my career with a leading ophthalmology company as well as a multi-national Biopharmaceutical company in the US and Japan. Having the opportunity to work both in a very innovative hub in the US and Japan were great experiences.

Now, coming to an emerging market within Merck and being able to draw on all the experiences from my career will help but also a challenge. Every day I ask myself, “How can I bring the innovative medicines to Thailand? How can expand on the use of the Japanese Universal healthcare here? How can Thai patients have better access to this type of care?” These are the many questions I ask myself as I engage with my teams every day with purpose.

Asia is crucial to Merck’s global operations, representing 33 percent of total sales. What is the strategic significance of Thailand for Merck within Asia?

Merck has been present in Thailand for over 100 years. We started a joint venture and legal entity here in 1991. We continue to be very active in diabetes, cardiology, oncology, fertility and neurology and aim to provide the necessary products but also insights and medical information to the medical institutions, universities and hospitals. Being able to help grow this market over the past 27 years and trying to continue this legacy is an honour. Our objective now is to continue this legacy, not only with my leadership but with the entire leadership of the team.

We contribute to our Asia Pacific operations serving over 69 million patients. There is a lot of openness to different cultures and different ways of thinking in Thailand, the workforce is diverse, very well-educated and highly skilled. Many Thai physicians have been overseas to get international exposure, education and knowledge. Thailand is an important market to many of MNCs in Asia-Pacific, it is developed with a lot of opportunities.

Can you give us an insight into the Thai pharma market and Merck’s role within it?

The pharmaceutical market in Thailand is continuing to transform with median pricing policies as well as Oncology OCPA reimbursement system. With this, the growth of the Thailand pharmaceutical market has declined in value and continued to grow in volume given the ageing population. Our performance is in line with other Multinational companies within the market.

We are concentrating our efforts on treating the patients with the medicines that they are able to acquire, bring success to the people, and go through the R&D process. As long as we are focused on the patient, delivering innovative therapies, and extending lives, then we can say we are making progress toward achieving our goal of meeting patient needs.

Every year in Thailand we treat more than 466,000 patients with our general medicine portfolio. In Oncology, we have provided more than 8,700 additional years of time, which is more time for grandparents to spend with their grandchildren, for example.

We have also contributed to the birth of 16,000 babies through our fertility portfolio. All these figures are driving the entire team to work harder. We are providing time for the patient, and this is our biggest success. We are following and continuing this legacy and acting with a sense of purpose.

Merck has a very diverse portfolio among different therapeutic areas: cardiovascular, diabetes, oncology, and neurology. How does your portfolio look like in the country?

At Merck Thailand we have many different innovative products that either extend life or that can create life, and we have the ability to fill that medical need to be able to grow for the future.

Fertility is also growing for us because Thailand continues to be a medical hub for the Asia Pacific. 50 percent of the patients come from the domestic market and the other 50 percent comes from medical tourism. Merck Thailand continues to be the leader in the area of fertility in Thailand. We are very well diversified and able to invest in our pharmaceutical portfolio and pipeline with plans to introduce innovative products that may have already launched in Europe, US, and Asia-Pacific.

What are the priorities and goals that you wanted to achieve when you took charge of Merck Thailand?

Challenges are easy to overcome as long as you have a great team. The Merck Thailand organization has an amazing group of people who have done an amazing job over the past 27 years. One of my priorities was to combine all the knowledge that I acquired during my career to develop people and bring new products to the market. Recently we launched a fertility technology and we have several additional products in our pipeline in this field.

In diabetes and cardiovascular, we are focused on pre-diabetes and prevention through patient lifestyle management. Merck Thailand is well-positioned on the biopharma side, thanks to our portfolio. 50 percent of our business is based on pharma and the remaining 50 percent is focused on process solutions, life science, and performance materials. We are working on prevention and education, not only on providing pharmaceutical therapies.

My first mission is to carry on growing the core of our business, then expanding and accelerating the growth. The last priority is to develop our people. I believe that the success of an organization depends on the people. My role is to develop people's skills and ensure that they are gaining good experience from their work. The Thai culture is about stability, many of my senior managers have been working at Merck for more than ten years.

I truly believe that success radiates from inside the company. At Merck, we are trying to experience different things, to challenge our people and make our affiliate a different place to work.

Belen Garijo, CEO of Merck Healthcare highlighted the need to look 'beyond treatment' to combat different diseases. What is Merck Thailand doing, "beyond treatment" for the patients to benefit from the company's long-standing expertise?

My previous experiences have been driven mostly by the product and treatment. In Thailand, we are continuing to go beyond treatment by partnering with hospitals in diabetes management and enhance educational disease state programs.

In the fertility field, we are working with different stakeholders as a consultant to help them to improve and support their business and to be able to treat more patients more effectively. At the end of the day, of course, we are coming back to patient treatment. But being able to work with clinics and talk about diabetes and cardiovascular management with hospitals and nurses means a lot for the company.

Stefan Oschmann, global CEO of Merck has said that creating an effective partnership means combining the strengths of Merck with those of your partners in order to share knowledge and insight. How does Merck Thailand position itself as a partner of choice for the government, the industry and patients?

When the joint venture was created, we didn't have an organizational footprint in the country. We are still in the young adult stage of our history in Thailand and have been able to partner with industry and discuss with key stakeholders opportunities to enhance patient access. From the hospital perspective, we are partnering for the patient's education, but also the education of their physicians, and being able to be successful in the treatment and care of their patients. Last but not least are the Thai people, and not only the patients who are in the hospital.

We have implemented various Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities and trying to do more. For example, one of them is about how to we enlighten students in schools by teaching classes on healthcare as well as general topics such as mathematics, science, and Thai language. Another CSR activity that we have created is our '5K Fun Run' that we organized last year. Our entire affiliate participated in the run and we invited all of the citizens of Bangkok to participate. All the funds raised went to health equipment and the development of education and prevention programs.

Last year Merck celebrated 350 years of innovation with the motto "Always curious – Imagine the next 350 years". How does being "always curious" help you lead the Thai affiliate?

Curiosity can have many different meanings, if you ask the employees in our office, they will all give you a different definition of the term. We are using the spirit of this word to go beyond our work on a daily basis, to push ourselves further. Continuing to be curious has been in the DNA of Merck for over 350 years and it will remain so for the next 350. The ability to be curious is about being able to say what we can do personally, what we can do to meet the needs of the hospitals, the doctors. It is about asking what I can do additionally, how I can think in a way that somebody else has not thought about before. Being curious gives an open door to an innovative program and creates opportunities for our people.

What are the image and key qualities of the Merck Thailand you would like to highlight to our global audience? What would you like to achieve in the next five years?

The global model of Merck is being united to grow everywhere. But for Merck Thailand, we can also add that is all about caring. Care is caring for the people, for our peers, for the patients and also for yourself. We always say, "dare to care". We are asking ourselves every day what we can do to care for ourselves in our professional development, and for our family.

Within the next five years, I am confident we will successfully provide new products and indications to a broader audience. I would like for us to continue to be recognized as the fertility leader here and have established the affiliate in fertility drugs, fertility care, IVF and fertility technologies. We also want to continue to maintain and enhance our footprint in the oncology field. Finally, I would

like to hear more from our people in the company, how they have been able to develop above and beyond their imagination and achieve what they believe was ambitious and take a look back on journey we have all been on. It is all about continuous learning, being open-minded, and empowering people.

See more interviews