Kevin Peters – Managing Director, MSD Thailand



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Kevin Peters, Managing Director of MSD in Thailand

, highlights the strategic significance and strong performance of the affiliate as a top three pharmaceutical player in Thailand. Kevin goes on to share his mission to position MSD as an innovative partner of Thailand's healthcare stakeholders in improving the outcomes, access, and education of Thai patients.

You have had a long tenure with MSD across several countries before joining the affiliate in 2018. Can you introduce your journey within MSD which brought you to Thailand?

Having been with MSD for 20 years, I have been exceptionally fortunate for the development opportunities I received throughout my career. I started in the UK as a sales representative working through several sales and marketing functions there. Later on, I took a regional position working on MSD's diversified brand portfolio across various markets. I have also held global positions in Switzerland in the area of oncology, and most recently, I worked as chief marketing officer in China for several years. Having so many opportunities to travel and hold different roles within the company has been absolutely stunning from both a professional and personal standpoint.

What have been your first impressions upon taking the role of Managing Director of MSD Thailand?

When I arrived, I first and foremost noticed how amazing the country is with its culture and people. Many people warned me that Thailand is a very challenging environment in terms of market dynamics, which it is. There is an economic recession and many hurdles when it comes to bringing innovation into the market. However, within the last year, I have seen a significant shift in dynamism within the environment. I can see a strong desire from the government and health stakeholders to improve the healthcare of Thai patients.

In the context of all the challenges being faced by Thailand's healthcare ecosystem, how is the affiliate performing in the market?

Within the market ranking, MSD is one of the top three pharmaceutical companies in Thailand, which is one of the key strategic markets for the company in the ASEAN region. We have faced some challenges in the past, but the affiliate is back on track and hopefully, we will continue to see a solid performance moving forward across our entire portfolio.

What will be your strategy to keep this performance sustainable?

In MSD our number one focus is on patients. For example, in Thailand alone, we touch about four million patients though our total portfolio. By focusing on what is the most important aspect of our industry and putting patients as the center of everything we do, I believe this will ultimately lead to our success in the market. As our founder, George Merck, once said, "We try never to forget that medicine is for the people. It is not for the profits. The profits follow, and if we have remembered that, they have never failed to appear." My priority as managing director is very clear; we have to strive to bring more innovative treatments to Thai patients.

Over the past several years we have seen major advances in the quality of care and treatment for major disease groups like diabetes, cancers and HIV. This is being said, we must continue to push health forward not only through education but access as well. MSD has always been in innovation-driven company. Since our establishment, we have brought first-in-class treatments many times to market. This focus on R&D innovation continues to be the company's strategy and we are focused on not only bringing innovative medicines to Thailand, but also ensuring accessibility to the broadest patient population possible.

How difficult is it to bring these innovations to Thailand and what rooms for improvement do you identify?

Every healthcare system around the world is struggling with the same questions of aging population, increases in chronic disease, and rising costs. As managing director of MSD in Thailand, I aim to work in partnership with the Thai authorities to explore solutions for improving affordability and finding new ways in which we can fund healthcare. Market access is not just about the cost of a drug, but also education, screening, and delivery. All of these aspects we can help leverage by building a cooperative relationship. MSD is not only bringing a medicine or vaccine to Thailand, but rather a full partnership solution for the greater health ecosystem.

What is your assessment of the local government's openness to communication with the pharma industry?

There has been a shift in Thailand, and we can see great ambition from the authorities to work together with pharma. Whether you are part of the private or public sector, we all share a mutual goal of improving patient care. Historically there has often been a suspicion from the government, but it is also up to the industry to show that we can work together transparently, ethically and appropriately.

What do you see as the most significant disease trends in Thailand and how is your local portfolio adapted to meet these needs?

Starting with vaccines, MSD is not only one of the largest manufacturers, but also a leading research company in the space. We understand that vaccines are not only essential for improving health, but they also have an important economic benefit – prevention is always better than treatment.

For example, HPV is a direct cause of cervical cancer. By not only providing vaccines, but also supporting services like education and screening, MSD can play a major role in the goal of eliminating cervical cancer in Thailand.

This is not a short-term goal, so to accomplish this we have brought MSD's full portfolio to Thailand. Moreover, we have recently been granted gender-neutral application which allows for boys to be

vaccinated as well. This will be a major step in helping to fight the spread of HPV.

We are not only focusing on HPV but have vaccines for pediatric and adult populations as well across different areas. Furthermore, MSD has a very exiting vaccine pipeline, many of which are being clinically researched here in Thailand. Thailand is an important clinical research hub for MSD, and we are continuing to increase our investment into the county; last year we increased our research activity by almost 30 percent than the previous year across many key therapeutic areas.

On the other hand, my number one priority for the affiliate's portfolio is immuno-oncology. In Thailand, there are about 120,000 patients diagnosed each year with cancers. All around the world we have seen significantly improved survival rates thanks to a combination of earlier access, better education, improved treatments, and new drug developments. MSD is well recognized in bringing innovative therapies to the market. With over 1,000 ongoing clinical studies globally, our product has the potential to fundamentally change the way we treat cancer. If we can bring access to this innovation to Thailand, this would be a major breakthrough for Thai patients.

Cancer is a huge health burden which must be made a priority in Thailand and we owe it to the country to be a partner in facing this challenge. We are working with the government to broaden the access and explore different ways of funding to fight against cancers.

Considering Thailand's Industry 4.0 policy, how are you taking advantage of the current landscape to drive MSD's own digital transformation?

Digitalization is a fundamentally different way of working and both patients and physicians are getting information and managing treatments through digital channels today. We are putting more and more resources into our own digital transformation and working on how we can build communication and provide better education to stakeholders. For us, digitalization is more than just products but also a solution that can raise health awareness, improve supply chains, and improve efficiencies.

Do you feel that innovation is fairly valued by the stakeholders of Thailand?

In each industry this varies, but I was lucky enough to be elected as a board member of the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers Association (PReMA) last year. I have seen that building the ecosystem of innovation is a combination of policy, processes, ministry cooperation,

pricing, and much more which is an initiative that MSD can to be a supporting member for. As the pharma industry, we must demonstrate the value of innovation in saving and improving lives. Fortunately, we see there is an openness to communication from the health authorities which will help us in coming together to achieve this common vision.

Furthering patient centricity has become a buzzword in the pharmaceutical industry, but everyone has their own meaning for the phrase. How do you define patient centricity?

To me, patient-centricity means we put the patients at the heart of everything we do. Our ultimate goal is to make sure each patient has the best chance to have a healthcare intervention that will improve or save their life. This is a big goal to reach and I do not believe the industry can work independently from the government and healthcare professionals to achieve it.

After two decades in the company, what has kept you so loyal to MSD?

The short answer is people and products. We work with the most talented people in the industry both at the local and global level. MSD also has some of the best products available in the industry and we have been the innovator in so many disease areas.

Aside from this, looking even deeper, it is the core values of MSD that keep me in the company. When many companies were moving away from innovation led R&D, the company stood by our mission to identify clinical unmet needs and launch new products that make a fundamental difference in society. Working in MSD, I know I will be in an ethically sound environment where everyone is working towards a greater common goal.

What kind of workplace culture would you like to cultivate among your team?

Within MSD’s leadership team, we spend a lot of time contemplating how we can help our people to develop. We are aggressively creating the best development pathways possible for our team, including sending members abroad to gain experience and knowledge in major markets like the US. On the other hand, we also take opportunities to bring in outside talent into MSD in order to further strengthen our skill base. Overall, the affiliate is only as good its people, so finding, recruiting, and retaining the best possible talent is one of our key priorities.

What is your vision for the affiliate that you are hoping to achieve as Managing Director?

I want MSD to be seen as a leading bio-pharmaceutical company that is fundamentally improving the way patients are treated in Thailand. I hope to be a top destination for attracting and developing talent in the country. Moreover, I want a create an ethical, motivated, and passionate team in Thailand that is aligned with our global mission of always putting patients first. As a team, we will continue to create opportunities for patients to truly experience all the innovation that MSD can offer.

What motivates you to continue down this career path that you have chosen in the pharma industry with MSD?

At a base level, I need to feel challenged and have the opportunity to learn and grow in a job while being able to make a difference in society. However, I never quite feel that I have finished my role. I have a strong desire to always do better or do more. Being in Thailand where there are such promising opportunities to improve the health environment, build a strong work culture, and deliver stakeholder return, there is always one step further I can go. It is a personal drive that I feel to be better than the day before.

What final message would you like to deliver on behalf of MSD in Thailand?

Thailand is an amazing country that deserves the best possible healthcare system. Furthermore, this is a very special industry that we work in because there is an opportunity to fundamentally change the way that people live.

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