Kit Tang – General Manager, Roche Diagnostics Taiwan



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The combined strengths of pharmaceuticals and diagnostics under one roof have made Roche the leader in personalized healthcare – a strategy that aims to fit the right treatment to each patient in the best way possible. Kit Tang, general manager of Roche Diagnostics Taiwan, discusses how the Taiwanese affiliate fits into the broader Asian market, the range of diagnostic solutions they have on offer in Taiwan, and how physicians and hospitals perceive the diagnostic products Roche is selling in light of the digitalization trend.

You began working for Roche in 2005 and have since worked in many different markets with the company. Can you briefly introduce yourself to our international audience?

I graduated from the University of Cambridge with a master's degree in pharmacology and a PhD in protein engineering. I then moved back to Asia and started working for a few startup companies in the Hong Kong and Beijing area. These companies ended up doing very well as one IPOed, and the other ended up being acquired. After a short career working in startup companies, I began to think about the next stage in my career development, which was to gain corporate experience. Subsequently, I joined Roche in Hong Kong. Early on, Roche provided me with an opportunity to take part in their global rotation program. This was a great experience and I spent two years with four projects in four separate locations, including the HQ in Basel Switzerland.

Once I finished the rotation program, I moved to Shanghai and began leading one of the departments. I found the Chinese market to be eye-opening as it is a fast-moving economy with many opportunities, however, the complexity is at a level I have never seen before. By complexity, I mean government policy, product distribution, regulatory environment and the dynamics of competitors. In China, there are many government initiatives which have created a vast amount of local competition. This is why the market landscape differs greatly from most other nations in the world. Last year I was approached with the opportunity to move to Taiwan and take over as the GM. I was delighted to accept the offer as I am not only a GM but also the Chairman of the Board for Roche Diagnostics in Taiwan.

How does a small market like Taiwan fit into the larger parameters of Asia Pacific for Roche Diagnostics?

Taiwan has a small population in comparison to other Asian markets, with approximately 23 million people. However, there are several areas that Taiwan is a world leader, such as the government health insurance system. This is a well-recognized healthcare system globally, in terms of coverage, efficiencies and the level of services provided. Over half of the hospitals and clinics in Taiwan are run by private companies, which helps to ensure a patient-centric focus. Furthermore, there has been a great deal of discussion on efficiencies toward technological development. When there is a new global product launch, Taiwan is normally one of the leading markets, particularly in diagnostics.

The Taiwanese affiliate has been setting many benchmarks in the global development of diagnostics. Furthermore, in terms of benchmarking for the industry, Taiwan is in the leading position. In other words, Taiwan is leading the medical device industry from an alternative perspective.

2018 was probably one of the best years for Roche Diagnostics globally. How has the Taiwanese affiliate been performing overall?

The Taiwanese affiliate has performed extremely well this year, achieving double-digit growth compared with last year! We are more than a traditional medical device company, in that we are collaborating with key opinion leaders in Taiwan. We do this by co-creating with leaders and medical practitioners the medical values of new biomarkers and assays. Through this joint effort, a

greater number of clinicians now understand the value of diagnostics for the management of their patients.

Roche Diagnostics has a range of diagnostic solutions in Taiwan, from point of care (POC) to diabetes care. Can you tell us more about your business range?

We have screening tests for healthy individuals to aid physicians in evaluating the status of healthy people. For individuals that are suspected to be suffering from some type of disease, we conduct all of the tests. Therefore, physicians can confirm whether an individual does or does not have a disease.

Furthermore, we have products that help clinicians tell which drug, therapy or product is best for particular types of patients, and we call this ‘companion diagnostics’. We also have a product that can help clinicians monitor the effectiveness of the disease treatments. In terms of diabetes care, we have some over the counter products (OTC), which help to monitor diabetes patients blood glucose on a daily basis.

Finally, we have decision solutions which are known as ‘clinical decision support’. For example, there are many tests, diagnosis and monitoring services for cancer patients which we call ‘multi-disciplinary data’. Clinicians will typically speak to many experts in a range of areas to collect the data relating to cancer patients, then they can make an informed decision on how to treat the patient. Historically, this has been a very tedious process, as it is not integrated.

Due to this need, we are launching a system in Taiwan called Navify, which is a clinical decision support platform. Now hospitals will be able to integrate all of the data relating to particular patients and incorporate it into one platform. This platform will then link with data outside of hospitals, for example, treatment guidelines, global clinical trials, and scientific medical publications. Thus, allowing doctors to have a wealth of information at their fingertips.

How do both doctors and hospitals perceive the solutions you are selling?

There is some hesitation, as they have been using a specific practice or approach for several years. Whenever changes are made, there is always a risk. Firstly, clinicians and hospitals need to see the value that a new product or solution can bring, compared to the associated risk of changing from their current practice to a new practice. Once this has been determined, we then engage with

influential hospitals in Taiwan, along with key opinion leaders who partner with us to evaluate the new product or solution. Taiwan is a highly regulated market, from product registration to business relationships with customers, therefore, it is a step by step process.

What is your strategy for pushing Roche Diagnostics here to compete effectively with other industry giants?

It is all about our commitment to the market. All of our staff serving the Taiwanese market are based in Taiwan, and this demonstrates our commitment to the market. Some companies in the market tend to think that because Taiwan is small compared with Japan, Korea or China, they may not commit in the same fashion. For example, some of these company's pre-sales, sales, and after-sales employees are based outside of Taiwan. This will make an impact on how they are servicing their customers. We have made a solid commitment to the Taiwanese market, furthermore, we have translated this commitment into an extremely high standard of quality.

Only two percent of healthcare spending is allocated to diagnostics worldwide, how aware are Taiwanese healthcare stakeholders, practitioners and patients of the huge benefits diagnostics can bring to healthcare provision?

Many people I speak to who are not directly involved in the industry may not entirely understand diagnostics. Significant knowledge sharing is thus required, not only for patients but also for the decision-makers. For example, decision-makers in a government setting, or even in the hospitals. Hopefully, they will see the value of diagnostics, which will, in turn, lead them to invest further in the area.

How is Roche Diagnostics partnering with both the government and medical community to advocate for investment in the area?

What I mentioned does not only apply to Taiwan, it is happening all over the world. We have multiple approaches to educate key stakeholders. On occasion, we invite a team of experts from other markets to visit Taiwan and run seminars. We also encourage decision-makers in Taiwan to attend overseas events and conferences, to encourage the transfer of knowledge and bring this knowledge back. Furthermore, we have a dedicated team called clinical promotion, who organize

local events to encourage the exchange of knowledge.

As a leading company in precision medicine, how do you evaluate Taiwan´s efforts to position itself as a hub for precision medicine in Asia?

Taiwan is in a leading position for companion diagnostics, and targeted therapy treatments. The Taiwan Food and Drug Administration (TFDA), is very agile and they are constantly watching the latest developments for product innovation. This is key for them to quickly establish both the regulatory requirements and practice for new innovative products. Furthermore, the government has invested a lot of resources to encourage innovations and a great example of this is digital healthcare.

In 2017 Roche Diagnostics won the Best Employer Award in Taiwan, how do you handle the hiring and retaining of the best talent?

Firstly, we invest heavily in people development which is why we are highly regarded in the industry. We have many different programs in the organization for employees, including the rotational program that I went on and other internal exchange opportunities as well.

What are some of your strategic priorities and objectives for Roche Diagnostics in Taiwan over the next five years?

Taiwan is famous for information technology (IT) and we are now launching into digital healthcare ourselves. There are many opportunities for us to work with the government and local hospitals to co-develop digital solutions for the healthcare industry. I want to emphasize co-development because we are customizing these solutions for the local industries, therefore, we will be developing solutions together. Another area would be the operational efficiency of our customers. Just as in many other markets the supply of laboratory technicians is becoming more and more challenging. This is why we have begun to launch several solutions for our customers, which will allow them to have total automation in the laboratory.

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