Shuhei Sekiguchi – Managing Director, Janssen Taiwan

Taiwan is conducive to attracting R&D investment and the quality of clinical operations, allowing products to be introduced into the Taiwanese market, is high

25.09.2019

Tags: Taiwan, Research, Market Access, Innovation, Janssen, Strategy

Shuhei Sekiguchi, recently-appointed managing director of Janssen Taiwan, discusses how his vast experience in marketing and sales will help him in this new role, Janssen´s market outlook for Taiwan, its strategy for educating key stakeholders, and the importance of talent acquisition and retention.

As you have recently joined the affiliate, can you introduce the company in Taiwan and how you see your prior experience translating into your new position as MD?

Janssen is an R&D-driven company and is a division of J&J. We are primarily focused on medical innovation, and in fact, we invest more in R&D than we do in marketing. Our number one priority is producing new products for the market and ensuring patients in Taiwan have the same access to innovation that patients in other markets have.

My background has been focused primarily on the commercial aspects of business, i.e. sales and marketing. Within sales and marketing, one is delivering products to patients within a marketplace, and this is no different from what we are doing in Taiwan. In an MD role, the responsibility is greater as one needs to manage more functions, but ultimately the aim remains the same, which is to deliver innovation and products to meet the unmet needs here.

I would say my background in sales and marketing certainly helps me in keeping our focus external. Furthermore, it is important to strengthen the organization and have the right business model in place. However, there needs to be a clear external focus as well, therefore, I believe my commercial background will be of great advantage in leading the Taiwanese affiliate.

Janssen is one of the largest pharmaceutical companies in the world, and in APAC you have over 7,000 employees. What is the strategic significance of the Taiwanese affiliate to the wider Asian market?

J&J is a large company, with around USD 80 billion in sales. Half of that figure derives from pharmaceutical sales, and the importance of the pharma market in Taiwan is no different. When one looks at the overall population of Asia Pacific, there is no question that it is an important region! The number of patients available, combined with the unmet needs here make APAC a priority region for Janssen.

Taiwan is conducive to attracting R&D investment and the quality of clinical operations, allowing products to be introduced into the Taiwanese market, is high. Therefore, it is a safe place to invest in R&D and healthcare. Moreover, the pharmaceutical products available in Taiwan, generally reflect those that are available in other markets. For example, some of the newest products in haematology, immunology and more recently in HIV, are not only available overseas but can also be accessed in Taiwan. The reason we can offer such a well-represented portfolio is largely due to the ability of our clinical operations to participate in global trials.

In 2008 we established our global clinical operations in Taiwan, and over the last ten years, we have quadrupled the number of people who sit on the team. Moreover, we have significantly increased the amount of investment being supplied to our clinical trials. A key priority as MD is to continue investing on behalf of Janssen, whilst ensuring our government partners continue to invest in healthcare as well. Thus, ensuring that innovation is rewarded, and access to a wide range of products is available in Taiwan.

How would you assess Janssen’s current market outlook in Taiwan regarding existing portfolio, growth and pipeline?

As aforementioned, the Taiwanese portfolio is very similar to our overseas offering. This is a direct reflection of the R&D we have attracted and favorable market access in Taiwan. We have also recently received registration for a product in STELARA® (for treatment of Crohn’s disease) which has led to significant success overseas. Furthermore, STELARA® is the largest product that we have at J&J which includes consumer healthcare, medical devices and pharmaceuticals. Therefore, STELARA® is a very important product for us and is part of the success behind the organization's ability to launch overseas.

Moreover, we have a new product called TREMFYA® (used for the treatment of psoriasis) which has recently received reimbursement in Taiwan. Janssen is performing well in psoriasis and this is based on our learnings through the predecessor, *STELARA®*. It is a similar case with multiple myeloma, as we have been able to obtain registration for products like DARZALEX® which we expect will perform well in Taiwan. Furthermore, for HIV, the registration and reimbursement of ODEFSEY® came through earlier in September.

Taiwan stands as a super-ageing country, with the population above 65 set to increase from 13 percent to more than 25 percent within ten years. In today's context of cost-containment and increasing stress on healthcare systems, how are you ensuring Janssen's innovation reaches Taiwan?

An ageing population and innovation certainly go together. The way most people think about an ageing population is the number of people over 65 that are supported by those of working age. This proportion of over 65s is steadily increasing, which means healthcare expenditures will continue to rise as people age. There are multiple areas that we need to be aware of, and one of those areas is that the ageing population require innovation, which I believe is where Janssen can play an important role.

When a person gets older, the probability of getting ill increases drastically. This leads to a rise in the rate of cancer, cardiovascular disease and so on. To combat this, we aim to ensure innovative products and treatments for patients are accessible so that ultimately the cost can be reduced down the road. Another area is healthcare expenditure in Taiwan, where there is an opportunity for us to continue increasing investment into the sector, more so than in other OECD markets.

What are some solutions for cooperating with the government on co-payment agreements or risk-sharing agreements?

Innovation needs to be rewarded, and innovative products require years of work as well as a significant investment. Therefore, we need to ensure the Taiwanese people still have access to medication. However, I am aware of the debates taking place and this requires discussion as an industry. For instance, this morning I had a meeting where we discussed how to ensure innovation is not only rewarded but where patients still have access. It is a delicate balance between managing the loss of exclusivity of products and continuing to innovate with these products. The government must also be aware of the ageing population and how they need to continue investing.

What is Janssen's strategy for educating key stakeholders such as government, medical practitioners and patients on disease management and treatment in Taiwan?

Starting with oncology, more and more of these disease areas are being treated as chronic illnesses. Even infectious disease such as HIV is becoming more chronic in nature, where only 20 years ago this was a death sentence. Another example would be in psychiatry where our long-acting therapy is focused on patient attrition. When looking at each of these therapeutic areas, it is important to educate patients, as well as healthcare providers on the importance of remaining with a treatment. This is done by providing adequate feedback to physicians, so they can make better-informed decisions and alterations when necessary. We have also begun educational programs, for healthcare providers, hospitals and policy shapers. To conclude, we want to play a major role in educating patients through doctors, infrastructure and government.

Both the Minister of Health and Welfare and the Minister of Science and Technology highlighted that Taiwan is becoming a destination for clinical trial investments from Big Pharma. What clinical trial initiatives has Janssen has brought to Taiwan?

We set up global clinical operations in 2008 and have increased both the people working on our team and investment considerably in this time. This is a direct reflection of the 55 clinical trials that are currently active. We have an HPB phase 0 study which is only being conducted in Taiwan, and the data collected will be used to understand the future development in HPB treatment. The R&D strategy at Janssen is about focus and delivering transformation medical innovation.

Taiwan is a great match for us to run these trials due to both the quality, and government interest in having global data. Even after registration, Taiwan is relatively advanced when thinking about real-world evidence, health economics and health technology assessment (HTA). Furthermore, these are areas where Taiwan could do more in helping educate foreign markets that have implemented HTA more recently. It is for these reasons along with favourable market access, that makes it conducive for clinical trial programs to be conducted in Taiwan.

In Taiwan, you have partnered with the Industrial Technology Research Institute (ITRI), for the integration of breakthrough science and commercial innovations. How will this partnership benefit the affiliate and the nation as a whole?

The innovation centres have been established for early collaboration. Janssen has substantial expertise in pharmaceutical development and our disease area knowledge is bar none. The challenge lies in getting into compound development earlier, which can allow for more options. The innovation centre is focused around earlier collaboration, not only within pharma but cross-sectoral. These themes tie in nicely for us, where we have our expertise in development and ability to take products to market, combined with the learnings that can be gained from earlier research. Furthermore, being able to work across the healthcare sector as a whole is a major advantage that J&J brings to the game.

Talent is an important topic of discussion for the big pharma players in Taiwan. What are your first impressions of the availability and quality of talent in the market, and what would you like to achieve over the next five years?

Before I arrived, I was already impressed with the quality of talent here, as I have been working in the region for some time. Despite only having 23 million people in Taiwan, within Janssen, Taiwanese talent has always been over-represented. The Taiwanese are highly committed, and they are disease area experts. We not only have commercial competencies, but we also have medical affairs competencies and so on. All of these areas require in-depth knowledge from which I rely on. In terms of availability, this is a competitive market. Therefore, the most important aspect to me is that my people are engaged, and are provided with the breadth of experiences they are seeking to feel satisfied working for J&J. For example, we are moving into new disease areas, such as inflammatory bowel disease and new indications of haematology, which allows for people to stretch themselves.

My hope is for us to be a company that not only attracts top talent but can retain this talent in all areas, including regulatory affairs, clinical operations, medical affairs, finance, HR and so on. Finally, we want to remain externally focused, whilst ensuring we are responding to customer’s needs. Furthermore, we want to be ready to tackle new disease areas and be adequately resourced, in terms of knowledge in these areas for our patients.

See more interviews