Mervyn Lim – Vice President, ResMed Asia



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20.04.2021

Tags: Singapore, APAC, Asia-Pacific, ResMed, Medtech, Sleep Apnea

Mervyn Lim, Vice President, ResMed Asia, shares the company's journey through COVID-19 in the region, how the company is building on their digitalisation experience, his view on how different stakeholders have to come together to improve reimbursement, and the huge opportunity in a market where 80 percent of patients with sleep problems remain untreated.

Can you begin by introducing our international audience to yourself and your current position at ResMed?

ResMed is a global leader in digital health and cloud-connected medical devices, particularly in the area of sleep and respiratory disorders. The company celebrates 32 years of existence in 2021. We have a global footprint, headquartered in the US, with hubs in Singapore and Sydney, Australia.

Within the ResMed context, I play two roles. I lead the sleep and respiratory care business as a General Manager for emerging Asia markets, markets that are closer to home here in ASEAN and also some of East Asia's markets. At the same time, I also head strategic partnerships and business development for Asia-Pacific and Latin America.

What is the logic behind managing Latin America and Asia-Pacific from Singapore and how are you able to manage both?

Latin America is a very dynamic region. When you look at the model in relation to sleep health, or respiratory health, we find a lot of similarities in the healthcare infrastructure in terms of how people access and want to be treated across the diseases that we cover. Essentially, we find a lot more synergies than differences when we look at Latin America and Southeast Asia.

Examples of these synergies are how people pay out of pocket for many healthcare products and services, as well as the large gaps in terms of awareness and people seeking treatment. There is a lot of cross-learning and sharing between both markets now that we are one.

We have spoken to ResMed quite a few times, mostly in Europe; a very different healthcare context and market. What is ResMed in Asia today, in comparison to in Europe, and how do your priorities and strategy differ in this part of the world?

Globally, we are looking at almost one billion people that potentially have sleep apnea. Almost 80 percent of them remain untreated, meaning that they are either not aware or not taking action. If you look at Asia in particular, where nearly 66 percent of the world’s population live and which has vibrant economies and activities, there is a tremendous unmet need.

Most of Asia does not have reimbursement for the treatment of sleep apnea; that presents a unique challenge for us. What we like about Asia however, is that it is becoming increasingly digital, aiding the way we can reach and engage with people on sleep health.

When looking at any market, it is always about framing the common approach that we need. For us, the focus is on raising awareness and driving people to take action.

Regarding differences in each market, we address these by localising some of the approaches; some of these countries have geographical challenges that may make it difficult for people to come forward and seek treatment. That is where we see greater opportunities for digitalisation and tech-integrated care models. These allow us to construct the user journey from the time a patient becomes aware of a problem right up to the time that they go on therapy.

Of course, there are countries where the public healthcare system is more open to forms of reimbursement and support. We also work constructively with these systems to ease the costs and the burden of treatments.

ResMed had a good 2020 with growth of 13 percent thanks to the huge demand for devices, masks and ventilators. Can you comment on how 2020 was for Asia and how you pivoted and positioned yourself over the last 12 months?

2020 was a truly an unprecedented year. As a company, I think the most important thing, at the onset of the pandemic, was to ensure that all our team members across the globe were safe and the company was able to continue functioning effectively. That was probably the most important thing that we have done.

As you mentioned, we have been producing ventilators—for over 15 years. It was amazing to see that the company managed to ramp up our production of ventilators to supply over 150,000 much-needed units in the first half of 2020 to ease global demand. At the same time, we were still able to continue supporting our sleep patients during the pandemic.

This monumental achievement required a strong pivot, from the top leadership right down to everyone in distribution, supply chain and partners in a very short amount of time.

Being able to carry out both successfully, is a testament to ResMed's ability to always able to think out of the box and come up with innovative solutions. I am proud of the agility and resilience of the team.

What do you think is going to change for you and more broadly for your industry moving forward after COVID? What are the learnings or new paradigms you see emerging?

Prior to the pandemic, there was already an increase in the digitalisation of care models and how people access healthcare. I do not believe that the world will go back to the way it was; we are going to move into an increasingly tech-integrated space where care, content and engagement can be delivered in a variety of ways.

I do see that not just the industry, but also governments and the larger ecosystem, are more willing and open to come together in partnership to create this new user experience. This is very promising and should result in positive outcomes for everyone.

As an entire industry and ecosystem, the more we are able to think constructively about how to integrate technology and knowing how we want to digitise, the better off patients will be. One example of how digitalisation is improving our patient experience is telehealth, which was crucial in

allowing healthcare providers to monitor their patients remotely. Moving into a post-pandemic world, we will build on top of that foundation in a sustainable and scalable way.

What are your goals in terms of continuing this growth story and the success story in your region, and bringing your solutions to more patients?

Sleep apnea is a condition that many are still unaware of, or unable to treat. I think the challenge for our team is how we can educate and engage people to take action on their sleep health and get help through our respiratory solutions. We need win-win models for us and the healthcare ecosystem that are also able to deliver a satisfying and equitable experience for patients. ResMed is constantly looking at new innovations and technologies that can be scaled locally to help resolve this need.

You said that many markets you manage are out of pocket, does that mean that you have to engage patients directly or go after healthcare providers and payers? Who do you see as the key stakeholders to engage?

Patients and users are at the heart of all care models. The ecosystem in which they interact with stakeholders is just as important, but we want our message to be able to reach the consumer directly. We want to, of course, work collaboratively with stakeholders in the ecosystem, whether they are public health workers to industry payers, to construct a pathway for us to engage, serve and keep people satisfied.

What are the talent profiles that you look for along this journey and how important is this to your operations?

We believe that everyone comes with a unique set of talents, strengths and expertise. Coming together as one team, we put an emphasis on the ability to have a growth mindset; that means being entrepreneurial, being able to experiment and not be afraid of early setbacks. The journey towards the outcome is not always a straight line. This is something that all our teams across the region are aware of because we are breaking new ground in the area of digitalisation.

We are always on the lookout for new talents. As we increasingly push towards a more digitalised future, we recognise that talent could come not just from within the healthcare industry, but also

from other industries.

For example, someone who may have a background in technology may in fact possess skills and knowledge than can be applied to healthcare and what we are trying to do. As the healthcare industry evolves, so do the skills needed. For organisations such as ResMed, the challenge will be to identify these talents and train them so they can contribute their expertise to continue to move the industry forward.

What are the benefits of having your regional headquarters in Singapore? What can be leveraged from the Singaporean economic ecosystem?

Singapore presents a unique proposition as a hub where global trade and talent converge. This is what has allowed Singapore to thrive from the start and continues to make the country attractive to businesses and talents.

At the same time, the country is one that is always on the cusp of innovation and business, particularly in the healthcare space. With a presence in over 140 countries, and with our focus on finding and nurturing the best talent, this made Singapore the natural choice for our regional headquarters.

Looking into the future, what are your goals and plans for 2021 and beyond?

Firstly, it is important to ensure that, even though we are in a critical period of the pandemic, our teams across the region are able to continue operating safely and effectively, regardless of how and where they are based.

Secondly, we want to continue building on our sleep business, which was somewhat impacted during the acute periods of the pandemic. We see a huge opportunity here to continue to engage patients so they can then take action.

I would emphasise that the level of digitalisation is something that we will have to continue working on, and I’m excited for ResMed to continue leading the innovation in that space. Those of us who are privileged enough to be involved in digital health have a larger responsibility to be an open partner with other industries and benchmark our practices.

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