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What if early detection could change everything? That mindset is making the ecosystem more open, more curious, and more willing to collaborate on diagnostics and primary care

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Roche Diagnostics Hong Kong is entering a defining phase as the city accelerates its shift toward primary care, early detection and data-driven decision making. In this interview, General Manager Ronald Lo reflects on eighteen months of strategic progress, from expanding point-of-care testing and preparing breakthrough Alzheimer  s-related biomarkers to shaping regulatory reform and building new collaborations across insurance, innovation and community-based care. His perspective offers a clear view of how diagnostics can anchor Hong Kong  s next stage of healthcare development.

What have been the most significant strategic and operational developments for you in Hong Kong over the past 18 months?

Over the past year, we have focused on strengthening Hong Kong  s role as an innovation hub for Roche Diagnostics, with progress across collaborations, innovation, and regulation.

A key milestone was our collaboration with the Office for Attracting Strategic Enterprises (OASES). The signing ceremony marked an important step, as it demonstrated that policy makers recognise the role diagnostics can play in advancing major health priorities, including the Primary Healthcare Blueprint. For us it confirmed that Hong Kong sees value in long-term strategic partnerships that

support community-based care and early detection.

A second milestone was our continued collaboration with Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks to foster a more dynamic diagnostics innovation ecosystem. The co-incubation programme is already giving emerging health technology companies access to our scientific and operational expertise, helping them move from concept to clinical reality. It also reflects the city's broader ambition to build a more dynamic environment for diagnostics innovation.

The third area of progress is the regulatory landscape. For many years, in vitro diagnostics were brought to market through the voluntary Medical Device Administrative Control System (MDACS), which created a relatively open environment compared with the frameworks for pharmaceuticals and high-risk devices. The government is now transitioning toward a mandatory product registration system for medical devices including in vitro diagnostics in line with plans to establish the Centre for Medical Products Regulation (CMPR) by 2026. This evolution will introduce clearer quality safeguards while giving the public greater confidence in the diagnostics they rely on.

We engaged in these discussions from an early stage because we believe our technical knowledge can support the development of a robust and practical framework. This allowed us to build experience and share feedback as the system matured. After several years of advocacy, it is encouraging to see consensus forming across government, industry and the wider community on the importance of strengthening quality standards without slowing the introduction of new and meaningful diagnostics innovations.

According to the List of Medical Devices from the Department of Health of the HKSAR, Roche Diagnostics has listed more than one thousand diagnostic products under the voluntary MDACS scheme ahead of the statutory regime.

How are you advancing your focus on primary care diagnostics, particularly for diabetes and other chronic conditions?

Primary care has become a central part of our strategy. Many people can maintain good health if they have timely and accessible information about their condition, so placing these tests within primary care is an important step.

Two years ago we committed to building a stronger presence in this space, which led to the acquisition of a point-of-care diagnostics company supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The company offers a broad range of rapid tests for chronic and infectious diseases. One of its earliest applications is a molecular tuberculosis assay designed to improve access in low and middle income settings. Bringing this technology into our portfolio has allowed us to strengthen community-based diagnostics rather than relying only on large central laboratories.

The relevance to Hong Kong is immediate. We introduced a finger-stick HbA1c test, earlier this year to support primary care services. It aligns closely with the growing burden of diabetes and obesity, which affect a significant portion of the population.

Policy direction also supports this shift. The Primary Healthcare Blueprint has established a district-based model through the District Health Centres, which now serve as local hubs for screening, monitoring and long-term management. We are working to integrate point-of-care testing into this network so individuals can be reached earlier and supported closer to home. If Hong Kong intends to move from a hospital-centred system toward one grounded in prevention and early detection, diagnostics is an essential driver of primary care. We are committed to helping make that transition

possible.

How has the market responded to your point-of-care platform, and where are you seeing the earliest momentum?

Initial uptake has been most evident in the private sector, consistent with the rapid adoption of technologies by private clinics in Hong Kong to enhance diagnostic efficiency and patient experience. The platform itself is compact and uses a microfluidic strip produced through high-precision printing, and it includes what is currently the finger-stick NT-proBNP test available worldwide. This capability is particularly relevant because people living with diabetes face a markedly higher risk of heart failure, yet the symptoms often present subtly.

Private cardiologists and endocrinologists were therefore the first to act. Within the first week of launch, several KOLs reached out. A point-of-care option enables them to assess patients immediately rather than sending them into a referral pathway that can take weeks and may delay intervention. The ability to screen in real time gives clinicians a clearer foundation for early action, especially for patients whose symptoms might otherwise be overlooked.

While private clinics are the natural early adopters, the public system remains essential. The government's Primary Healthcare Blueprint has created a district-based structure through the District Health Centres, which already serve as hubs for monitoring, screening and lifestyle support. We are exploring, including through the OASES initiative, how additional point-of-care tests could be incorporated into this network. If these centres can offer simple diagnostics for diabetes, cardiovascular risk or infectious diseases, conditions can be identified and managed earlier within the community. This is the direction primary care needs to take, shifting the focus from reactive hospital treatment to proactive detection closer to where people live.

International experience from Australia, Europe and the United States shows that point-of-care diagnostics can improve outcomes and reduce emergency admissions.

Facilitate reduced hospital stays: Early detection of infectious diseases through POC testing can shorten the mean length of a hospital stay for infectious diseases by up to 34% and result in an equal reduction in bed occupancy and other resources¹.

Reduce referral rates: Ruling out heart failure in primary care has been shown to reduce referrals to specialists and the requirement for more advanced diagnostic interventions by 25%².

In Hong Kong, we are building our own evidence base, particularly in primary-care settings, and aim to demonstrate similar benefits through earlier screening, faster diagnosis and timely intervention.

What advances is Roche introducing in Alzheimer's diagnostics, and when will these tests become available in Hong Kong?

We are working to make Alzheimer's disease diagnostics more accessible in Hong Kong through a range of testing options. A cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) test is already available. Another would be a simple blood test which is expected to become available later this year.

These two options are important because they serve different needs. CSF testing provides very detailed information and is mainly used by specialists in hospitals. Blood testing, on the other hand,

is easier and more affordable, making it suitable for use in primary care settings. This allows doctors to screen more people and identify those who may have early signs of Alzheimer's disease, so they can be referred for further evaluation if needed.

A next-generation will be available soon for early detection of AD. By providing both CSF tests and blood tests, doctors can choose the option that best fits each patient, balancing accuracy, ease of testing, and clinical workflow.

Roche has strong expertise in laboratory systems, and these tests are designed to run on automated platforms. This means less manual work, faster results, and the ability to test more people efficiently. Keeping costs manageable is essential, because early diagnosis only makes a real difference when testing is widely accessible. Our goal is to offer tests that are clinically useful, affordable, and easy to use in everyday medical practice.

Early and reliable diagnosis benefits not only patients, but also their families and caregivers, who often bear significant emotional and practical responsibilities. Timely results give families clarity, help them plan ahead, and support better care as treatments continue to develop.

How would you characterise the economic sentiment in Hong Kong this year, and what developments are influencing your outlook as a business leader?

The atmosphere in Hong Kong feels noticeably more positive than in recent years. Our work with FWD has also contributed to this sense of momentum. We collaborated closely and are taking a very forward-thinking approach. Together we are advancing two initiatives. The first is joining forces to raise awareness on Comprehensive Genomic Profiling (CGP) together with the Hong Kong Sanatorium & Hospital Cancer Centre. CGP uses a panel of more than three hundred cancer-related genes and supports greater precision in oncology decisions.

The second initiative is a regional digital diagnostics agreement, with Hong Kong as the first market implementing our new solution. This will allow FWD to consolidate structured diagnostic data, build a broader analytical model and generate insights that support preventive care and future product design. The collaboration evolved naturally. Both sides were exploring ways to collaborate, and it became clear that our digital solutions could help FWD bring together a large and meaningful dataset.

The aim is not immediate clinical action but a clearer understanding of health histories and disease patterns. Their clients have responded well, and the programme is already expanding to other APAC markets, which shows that the model resonates. In Hong Kong, people tend to be open to genomic information when its purpose is transparent, and the focus remains on building knowledge that can support better decisions.

More broadly, we see signs of economic recovery. At Roche Diagnostics Hong Kong we are also experiencing a strong post-COVID rebound. Growth is coming from both the public and private sectors. The public side has been steady, while the private market, although still more variable, has returned to clear positive growth. All of this makes this year distinctly better than last, and the direction feels more constructive.

What priorities will guide your agenda for next year, and where do you see the strongest opportunities to advance Hong Kong's health system?

Primary care will remain my main priority because the Primary Healthcare Blueprint gives Hong Kong a clear and compelling direction. The opportunity now lies in reaching people earlier, particularly where timely intervention makes the greatest difference. Cervical cancer illustrates this well. It is a highly preventable cancer, and the WHO targets a seventy percent screening rate at ages 35-45³. The government launched a territory-wide programme and expanded the use of HPV testing for women aged 30-64⁴. The Blueprint has revived the conversation around self-sampling, outreach and broader access, and diagnostics can play a meaningful role in helping close that gap.

Looking ahead, we are advancing a range of technologies that strengthen diagnostics within the laboratory and beyond traditional lab settings, with clear benefits for both healthcare systems and patients.

Within the laboratory, one important development is mass spectrometry which remains unfamiliar to many outside specialist fields but represents a major step for routine diagnostics. The principle is simple, it identifies molecules by measuring their mass. Historically this required labour-intensive workflows that could take a week or more. We now have the fully automated mass spectrometry platform designed for routine laboratories, supports testing for hormone disorders, drug monitoring and certain rare or inborn conditions. Traditional systems are already part of Hong Kong's diagnostic landscape, an automated version can build on this foundation and support greater efficiency and capacity.

Beyond the laboratory, we are also advancing continuous glucose monitoring. We have a long heritage in glucose monitoring, having supported patients in Hong Kong with their daily health management for many years. Today, we are evolving that commitment by integrating Continuous Glucose Monitoring (CGM) technology into our portfolio. For us, this isn't just a technological shift; it's about meeting the next generation of patient needs and helping people live with more confidence.

This enables a more proactive approach to care. By utilizing AI-enabled predictive algorithms, we can help individuals stay ahead of their condition and anxieties of night-time hypoglycemia. It empowers them to take control of their health before a challenge even arises. It moves the conversation from reacting to data to taking informed action before an episode develops.

Our focus for the year ahead is to ensure these advanced technologies are accessible within the community, supporting earlier detection and empowering people with the practical means to live healthier, more stable lives. This aligns with our mission: doing now what patients need next.

As you look back on your term, what final reflections would you share on Hong Kong's healthcare evolution?

Reaching the end of my three-year term has given me space to appreciate how much the landscape has shifted. What stands out most is the change in mindset for innovation and collaboration has truly opened up.

The ecosystem is becoming more open, more curious, and increasingly willing to collaborate on solutions. There is a growing alignment across the ecosystem. We share a common vision with our collaborators to promote Hong Kong as a global innovation hub, and this is driving a significant increase in public interest regarding advanced diagnostics. Our long-standing collaboration with HKSTP is a perfect example of this. By showcasing our mass spectrometry platform together, we aren't just displaying technology; we are bringing high-end science into the public conversation to show how it supports the future of health.

This same spirit is evident in our dialogue with the government. Stakeholders are more ready than ever to explore new models and collaborate across sectors. While affordability and accessibility remain central, and rightly so these discussions are now more open and constructive. It is a meaningful evolution in how we solve problems together.

To me, true transformation extends beyond technology. It requires a shift in mindset to view healthcare not as a cost, but as an investment in long-term wellbeing and social sustainability. We drive this change by building deep roots with diverse stakeholders who share this goal.

As I look ahead, I hope this collaboration culture continues to deepen. Our role as a strategic enterprise in the OASES initiative reinforces our commitment to Hong Kong's ambitions in both innovation and primary care. I feel confident that we are moving toward a system where early detection truly changes everything, supporting better decisions and healthier lives for everyone.

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