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Malaysian national Jonathan Chin culminated his 20+-year career at Boehringer Ingelheim and became GM of the firm's Hong Kong and Macau affiliate in 2022. He explains his career path through multiple international roles, the shift arising from COVID-19 in Southeast Asia and China, as well as the characteristics of the Hong Kong market and its regulatory environment.

You have been with Boehringer Ingelheim for over two decades which shows an impressive level of commitment to the organization. Can you begin by telling us what has kept you with the company for all this time?

What has truly kept me devoted to the organization is the perfect balance it offers between work and personal life. My core values, such as trust, respect, and empathy, align seamlessly with the company's principles. This alignment creates a sense of joy and fulfilment, making it a pleasure to come to work every day. The harmony between my personal values and the company's values has been a driving force in my long-term commitment to Boehringer Ingelheim, spanning 21 years.

Throughout my career at Boehringer Ingelheim, I have embraced new challenges and opportunities. Rather than staying in one place, I have sought growth and development by taking

on more demanding roles every three to four years. This natural curiosity in me drives me to seek new horizons and expand my capabilities. The chance to explore different aspects of the organization and continually learn and evolve has been a motivating factor for me, allowing me to grow both personally and professionally.

How would you characterize your experience rising through the ranks within Boehringer Ingelheim as a Malaysian national having developed an international career?

It has been an incredible journey filled with challenges and opportunities. In the pharma industry, it is true that many regional leaders often come from elsewhere and not necessary from Malaysia. However, I firmly believe that talent and potential know no boundaries. It is about breaking barriers, being courageous, and seizing opportunities when they arise.

Throughout my career, I have been fortunate to have had senior leaders within the organization who inspired and believed in me, providing me with the chance to prove my capabilities. Now, as a leader myself, I see it as my responsibility to be a beacon of inspiration for others, especially aspiring individuals from underrepresented regions like Malaysia where senior leadership may not be as common. I want to be a guiding light and a role model for those talented individuals who simply need to be encouraged.

Being a life coach and a role model is of utmost importance to me, not just as a leader, but as a human being. I have been inspired by others throughout my journey, and I recognize the impact that such inspiration can have on someone’s career and personal growth. It is my sincere hope that I can inspire the next generations and empower them to pursue their dreams and aspirations without limitations.

Having worked as a regional business manager for emerging markets which included South America, Southeast Asia, and China to now being general manager of Hong Kong, how have you seen the region evolve over the last few years and in the wake of COVID-19?

Over the years, prior to COVID-19, I observed a region that was characterised by high growth, dynamism, and a sense of energy and possibilities. In Southeast Asia, and China, the narrative was centred around ambition, optimism, and a focus on solving problems and driving rapid growth. The teams I worked with were always striving to bring innovation quickly to the market, shaping

strategies to create value, and driving business forward.

However, when the COVID-19 pandemic struck, I noticed a shift in the dynamics of the region. Bureaucracy became more prevalent, and decisions were made with strict discipline, reflecting the urgency of managing the pandemic. Asia, especially Greater China, took stringent measures to manage the pandemic, which had a significant impact on health budgets. As economies shut down, businesses faced challenges, leading to a downward spiral and pressure on drug prices. In China, we had already seen the emergence of volume-based procurement for off patent drugs and national price negotiations for new innovations that pursued inclusion into the national reimbursement drug list, but the pandemic further accelerated these trends.

On the positive side, the pandemic also accelerated the digital economy in the region. China, in particular, was already advanced in terms of online distribution channels compared to the rest of the world. The pandemic further expanded digital ecosystems in China and other parts of the world, resulting in significant changes such as virtual consulting and increased adoption of digital tools for healthcare services.

With the digital advancements made during the pandemic, it is essential to ensure that we do not fall back into old practices. The region, including Hong Kong, has opened up, but the experience of relying on digital tools has become ingrained in people’s habits. As an organization, we must focus on leveraging and further enhancing these digital. Embracing and sustaining the digital transformation will be crucial as we move forward in this evolving healthcare landscape.

Do you see Hong Kong and Boehringer Ingelheim as being well positioned to embrace this increasingly rapid digital transformation?

Absolutely. While the pace might differ from Europe or the US, Hong Kong has already established a strong digital ecosystem. People here are accustomed to using digital tools like WhatsApp, WeChat and Alipay, making the adoption of digital healthcare solutions more natural and faster. The trust in digital platforms is already built, and as the economy supports further growth, investments in digital technologies will continue to increase.

In Asia, the digital transformation is well established, and COVID-19 further accelerated its growth. While digital hospitals and pharmacies might still need some time to fully develop in Hong Kong, and mainland China has made significant progress in this area. However, it is important for regulators to play a role in managing this digital transformation to prevent misuse or abuse. By

maintaining a balance between innovation and regulation, we can create a sustainable and effective digital healthcare ecosystem that benefits everyone in the region.

How important is Hong Kong and the surrounding region for Boehringer Ingelheim from a global perspective?

Hong Kong and the surrounding markets hold immense importance for Boehringer Ingelheim. Our core mission is to transform lives for generations, and we go where the patients are. The demographics in Asia, particularly in this region, support our presence and our commitment to delivering innovations to these patients. The young and growing middle class here is hardworking and industrious, making it an ideal market for our products and services.

Moreover, the importance of this market goes beyond demographics. In the Asia Pacific, we see the future and aspirations of healthcare. Many first-in-class new molecules are being discovered in this part of the world, and research investments are growing rapidly. Over the last decade, the number of new molecules discovered in this region has been catching up to traditionally US and European-driven research. Additionally, conducting research here is more cost-effective compared to the western part of the world, making it a compelling opportunity for companies, including ours, to tap into this vibrant and dynamic market.

Looking at just population and GDP, Hong Kong is not an exceptionally large market and the healthcare expenditure is smaller than other territories with similar economic conditions. Can you offer some insights into what the characteristics of this market are?

The Hong Kong market, despite its size in terms of population and GDP, is a dynamic and fast-growing one, with a growth rate of four to six percent annually. This growth is driven by a strong middle class that is health-conscious and seeks the best standard of care for themselves and their families. The city has a well-established healthcare ecosystem, supported by 40 government hospitals and a plan to build even more in the coming years. The government's *Primary Healthcare Blueprint* further emphasizes early detection and prevention of diseases like hypertension, diabetes, and high lipids, which are prevalent among the middle-income population.

The healthcare system in Hong Kong is like a well-oiled machine that focuses not only on the quantity of care but also on improving the quality of care. The authorities are actively involved in supporting the industry and educating patients, ensuring that they have easier access to primary

care services through District Healthcare Centres (DHCs). The focus on prevention and early treatment helps improve the long-term prognosis for patients and contributes to the sustainable growth of the healthcare sector.

Moreover, Hong Kong's private healthcare sector is well-established and highly regarded for its quality of care. The city has a significant medical tourism industry, with many patients from mainland China seeking treatment here. The reputation of the healthcare system and the trust it instills are crucial factors in attracting both local and international patients.

Additionally, the Hong Kong market has safety nets in place, such as Samaritan funding and community funding, to provide reimbursement for treatment to individuals below the poverty line. These safety nets ensure that even those in vulnerable situations can access necessary medications and healthcare services.

What is the split of Boehringer Ingelheim's Hong Kong business between the private and public sectors and how would you characterize the local regulatory environment and tender process to acquiring medicines?

Approximately 65-70 percent of our operations are focused on hospital tenders for the public sector, while the remaining 30 to 35 percent is in the private sector. The private sector includes private hospitals and retail pharmacies. We place a significant emphasis on the public sector because it aligns with our values and principles of reaching a larger patient population and transforming lives for generations. Many patients in Hong Kong rely on the public healthcare system, and we want to ensure that our medications and healthcare solutions are accessible to as many people as possible, especially through the Hospital Authority tenders.

Regarding the local regulatory environment, it is important to understand that it is relative and can be compared to other markets. From my experience working in various countries, I would say that the negotiations with the Hospital Authority in Hong Kong are reasonable. The authorities are actively investing in healthcare and community-oriented initiatives, such as the district health centres, which aim to detect health issues early on and promote preventive measures. The government is committed to improving public health and managing healthcare costs more effectively in the long term. This community-driven approach is a positive aspect of the local regulatory environment.

Given that Hong Kong does not have an individual, fully-fledged regulatory body, do you expect this to be a barrier in terms of bringing new innovation to the territory?

The Hong Kong authorities are generally open to exploring and accepting innovative medications. As long as the pharmaceutical companies have a strong pipeline of innovative products, the authorities are receptive to reviewing and approving them. We go through a proper process, ensuring that all the necessary documentation is complete and solid, and this usually results in approval.

However, one issue that we face in Hong Kong is the speed of approval. The current requirement for two Certificates of a Pharmaceutical Product (CPP) before approval can be granted can significantly delay the process. In some cases, the US FDA and the European EMA have already approved the medication, but we still need to obtain additional approvals in Hong Kong, leading to a delay of up to two years. This prolonged timeline is a concern for all multinationals with research-oriented portfolios, including Boehringer Ingelheim.

As a part of the Hong Kong Association of the Pharmaceutical Industry, we are actively lobbying for a shorter approval timeline to accelerate the availability of innovative medications to patients in Hong Kong.

Can you expand on the Boehringer Ingelheim portfolio here in Hong Kong?

We have some exciting developments in our pipeline. We will be launching a psoriasis product early next year for a rare psoriasis condition called general pustular psoriasis. This product has already been approved by the FDA and is set to benefit patients in Hong Kong soon. Additionally, we are exploring new indications for our blockbuster diabetic drug. We hope to get approval for the chronic kidney disease (CKD) indication sometime next year, and we are also exploring potential treatment in the acute myocardial infarction indication, which is part of our longer-term plan. We are also enthusiastic about our obesity drug, which has great potential. If all goes well, we expect it to be available around 2028 or 2029.

In the field of oncology, we have a few promising compounds in the pipeline. We anticipate launching treatments for lung cancer in 2026 and 2027, with the possibility of exploring treatment options for gastrointestinal cancer as well. Overall, our portfolio in Hong Kong is diverse and focused on addressing the unmet medical needs of patients, including those with rare diseases and complex conditions.

Is there any final message you would like to share on behalf of Boehringer Ingelheim in Hong Kong?

I remain highly optimistic about the potential of the Hong Kong market, despite its size. It serves as a strong regional hub in Asia, attracting medical experts from across the Asia Pacific region for conferences and meetings. The city's strategic location, ease of connectivity, and respect for the rule of law make it an attractive destination. The medical infrastructure is well-established, and the authorities actively collaborate with the industry to improve healthcare, especially in primary care.

Hong Kong also offers a pool of talented individuals. I encourage the local talents to be bolder and more assertive, leveraging their unique advantage of being familiar with both Western and Asian cultures. This combination of Western education and appreciation for Asian values allows Hong Kongers to effectively communicate and collaborate with global colleagues, making them valuable assets in our industry. Despite challenges, I believe Hong Kong will continue to be a key player in advancing healthcare in the Asia Pacific region and beyond.

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