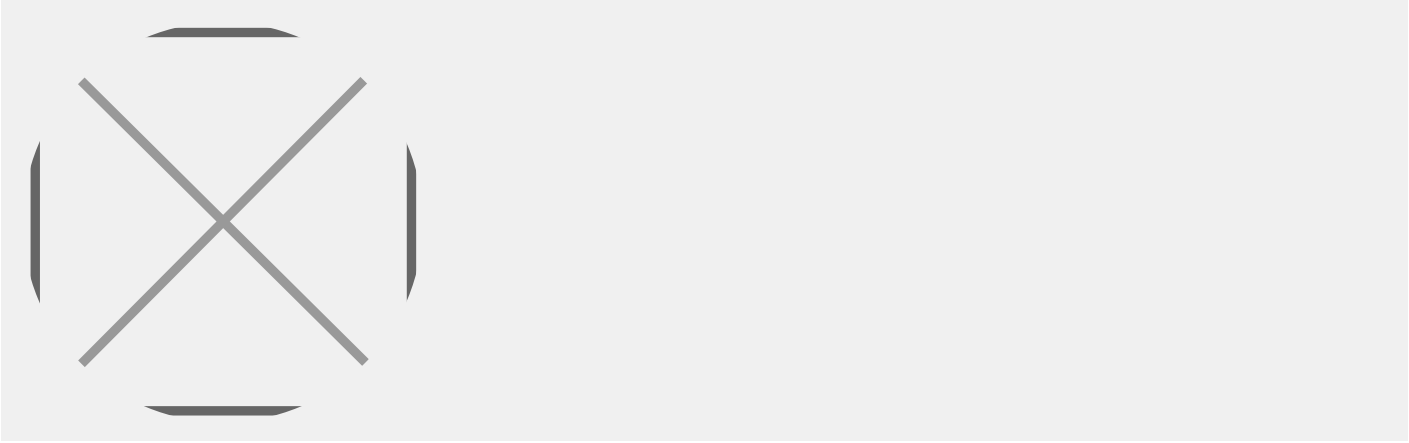
Interview with Parulian Simandjuntak MD, General Manager, Abbott Indonesia



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Abbott has been in Indonesia for roughly 42 years already. Over this time, has the affiliate managed to reach a positioning similar to that of the Group globally, or is there still work to be done?

Abbott is a global diversified healthcare company which comprises several businesses in Indonesia, including Established Pharmaceuticals, Nutrition, Diagnostics and Diabetes Care. Pharmaceuticals and Nutrition are our largest businesses here, and I am in charge of managing the first.

In Pharmaceuticals in Indonesia, we are among the top 50 companies in the market, which includes all of the local Indonesian companies.

The Indonesian pharmaceutical market is growing at a fast pace, with an average of roughly 13 to 14% CAGR. Abbott's pharmaceutical business in Indonesia is also growing rapidly.

What are the most important products within the portfolio of established pharmaceuticals?

Within our portfolio, we focus quite strongly on anti-epilepsy, dyslipidemia, men's and women's health, as well as antibiotics. As part of the global portfolio, we have a range of established products here, some of which we have offered for decades that represent important, trusted and reliable treatment options for patients.

The disease profiles are also evolving in Indonesia, with more affluent patients creating a higher need in areas such as diabetes and cardiovascular. How have you observed these changes?

As with any other fast-growing market, Indonesia disease profiles are evolving to more closely resemble those of developed countries. For example, Indonesia is one of the top five countries with the highest number of estimated cases of diabetes. Cardiovascular disease is also one of the top non-infectious diseases causing mortality in Indonesia.

We have observed these changes and we engage with different stakeholders to raise awareness of these diseases and help advance patient care. For example, we have started to increase awareness of the importance of triglyceride levels to better assess cardiovascular risk. This is done in collaboration with various hospitals throughout the country.

Indonesia's per capita GDP increase has not necessarily increased the population's spending on healthcare. Is Abbott taking steps to increase the awareness for people to take better care of their health?

We are taking specific steps to do so. For instance, more than 8 million people in Indonesia suffer from epilepsy, yet awareness and treatment of the disease remain very low. The disease itself continues to carry a very negative stigma in Indonesia. Many Indonesians still see it as a type of curse or possession. Abbott is supporting the Indonesian Epilepsy Foundation to increase awareness on epilepsy. We also have engaged with other parties such as the Indonesian Psychiatric Association, the Indonesian Neurology Association, the media, key opinion leaders, etc. to raise awareness in this area. The feedback we heard from doctors indicates that an increased number of patients are coming to see them to seek proper diagnosis and treatment for their condition. Similar to epilepsy, we have also been working on enhancing the awareness of bipolar disease.

This is easier to do in larger cities than Indonesia's rural areas. How challenging has it been for Abbott to go beyond the urban areas?

Indeed, distribution remains quite a challenge, taking into account the complex geography of Indonesia with its 17,800 islands. With universal health care coverage on its way, I do hope to see all stakeholders working together to increase access to health care for the entire population. Pharmaceutical companies, government and distributors should all work together on improving the supply chain.

At Abbott, we are committed to raising awareness of some of the most prevalent diseases. As I mentioned earlier, we engage with a variety of stakeholders including media, patient associations and key opinion leaders to achieve that objective in all areas of the country.

In order for more people to have access to treatment, several of Abbott Indonesia's products are currently listed in Jamkesmas and ASKES. Jamkesmas is the government insurance for lowest income groups. It covers 76.4 million of population. ASKES is the government insurance for the civil servants covering approximately 16 million of population. This mainly helps the people in the rural areas, as it targets the lower income group of the Indonesian population.

Once the universal health care plan is rolled out, what scenario do you foresee for the Indonesian pharma market?

Abbott supports the ambitions of the Indonesian government to provide access to health care to its entire population.

Along with our peers, we participate in meetings with the government on this, including the Department of Health and its Deputy Minister of Health. We are committed to working toward solutions to help Indonesia expand access to healthcare.

You have been in place as General Manager since 2011. How do you look back at your personal development over these last two years?

Being responsible for the entire business and all different functions is a new thing for me. On a personal note, I try to balance work and life as much as possible. In this respect, I find it important to be able to spend sufficient time with my family.

It is great to have responsibility over people and the business while exchanging with regional management at the same time. It is a new challenge, but it has been a good experience for me.

One of the enjoyable aspects of working at Abbott is the possibility of operating in a local environment while being backed by a global company.

Do you feel that the higher management believes in the Indonesian market?

Indonesia is an important growth market for the company. The pharmaceutical industry alone is the largest in Southeast Asia and is expected to reach $8.2 billion by 2017. Indonesia is an emerging economy with strong GDP growth and a large population with significant unmet medical and

nutritional needs who can benefit from many of our diverse products.

You spoke of the new responsibility you now have over your people. Keeping them motivated certainly is essential to running a successful affiliate. How do you define your management style?

I am an open person and am very transparent about my impressions. I try to listen and communicate about what did and did not go well. These employees are our future leaders, so we need to listen to them. I also think it is very important to be able to stay very involved, to meet with patients and customers, and go into the field. You need to keep your finger on the pulse and understand what is happening out there. You need to spend time with the team and with the sales representatives. I always ask them about the challenges in the job, but also about their personal life. It is essential to be able to have an open conversation.

Is it an asset to be Indonesian yourself?

I do certainly see this as an asset to a certain extent, mainly because of my knowledge of the local environment and population needs as well as the ability to speak the local language. Not everyone is fluent in English here, or could hesitate when they speak in a non-native language. With them, I have the advantage of not having to face this barrier.

What can you tell future Abbott employees in Indonesia about their prospects within the company?

Abbott is a global company that offers the opportunity to have a full career in Indonesia, through different functions and divisions. The opportunity beyond Indonesia is also there, for those that want to grasp the chance to move to other affiliates. There certainly are opportunities to move.

In a market that is growing significantly already, how will you measure future success here?

Our objective is to increase access to our high-quality medicines in Indonesia.

We hope to grow faster than the market and bring new products to Indonesia. We also have to grow in both our prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) businesses. Apart from our established products, we need to ensure the introduction of new products too.

Going forward, there will be more and more news about Indonesia. It is a growing economy with a stable growth path. The progress and the investment are there and the future of Abbott too will be promising here.

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