Interview with David Yang, General Manager, Biogen Idec – China

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You have been here in China for about a year. What were your assumptions about China before you arrived and were things more or less what you thought they would be or were you surprised about the reality on the ground?

We conducted extensive research and scouting before setting up our company in China. We certainly believe that a wave of growth is and will occur here in China and in the Asia-Pacific region. For example, we have been very successful in involving India in our global clinical trials. Progress for us in China has been slower, however we see that many leading companies have successfully integrated China into their global clinical development activities. We are optimistic about rising to this challenge by being thoroughly prepared, and having a skilled and motivated local team in China.

You've been here for a year already, so that must have been enough time to get a very clear picture of the conditions on the ground. How do things look so far?

China certainly is a challenging and exciting market. Ever since China opened its doors thirty years ago, the country has been going through massive and rapid change. For me, it seems that change is one of the only constants. The many rules and regulations that come into play, and the size and diversity of the country itself, inevitably lead to challenges. Some regulations are still evolving so we often have to base our decisions on observations and make our best judgment. Importantly, it seems that China is seeking to improve the business environment. We see that the government is really determined to make things a lot better and Biogen Idec certainly wants to be here while these

improvements and developments take place.

How would you describe your commercial activity in China at this stage in terms of partnerships, roll out plan etc?

We are a small and focused operation right now, working together with local companies to register our innovative therapies. As we near the approval of our drugs, we are likely to look at collaborations with established companies to help us commercialize our products. Later on, we can start looking at whether we should undertake those activities ourselves. Eric Zwisler, CEO of Zuellig Pharma, told us that there is actually a fairly high barrier to entry in setting up new operations in China. Costs are now higher and there are still many challenges and complexities. Some of your big competitors in the MS space have been investing heavily in China from Sanofi Aventis to Merck Serono to Bayer.

How are you looking to find your niche here? Will you be rolling out this operation differently than you would in other markets?

We are the leader in multiple sclerosis and have multiple treatments for this chronic disease. Our AVONEX® drug for the treatment of relapsing forms of MS has more than 135,000 patients on therapy across 90 countries. We will introduce it to China by offering Chinese doctors and patients high efficacy and convenience. It is the only treatment which requires just one injection per week. Our TYSABRI® product brings new hope to MS patients with a new level of efficacy. It is the first new treatment for this disease in more than 10 years.As a global biotech leader Biogen Idec also transforms scientific discoveries into health care in other specialty markets within oncology, cardiovascular and hemophilia. Biogen Idec's successful strategy focuses on therapeutic areas with high unmet medical needs, and markets which have concentrated call points, a high scientific sell, and require significant patient and HCP support. Companies often develop markets through education campaigns and collaboration with government.

Have you been looking into these types of programs in China?

In the United States, Biogen Idec has a very strong patient education program where our experts provide advice and counseling on topics that are crucial in helping patients cope with the disorder. We provide these services for any and all MS patients, regardless of whether they are using our product or not. We are considering a similar program for China in conjunction with the launch of our products.Howard Sui from Merck Serono told us that there is a 'talent war' occurring in China with all the multinationals building out their presence alongside a booming local pharma and biotech scene. This causes a lot of turnover and competition for talent.

What is your HR plan and how are you looking to grow sustainably and attract and retain the best people?

I concur with Howard that the growing need for talented and good people in China represents one of the biggest management challenges facing multinationals and locally owned businesses. Yet the battle for talent takes place at different stages, with some areas seeing a very high turnover and more stability in other areas. Our HR strategy at Biogen Idec in China is to attract, retain and continuously excite the best talent by offering an opportunity to contribute to improving patients lives and by providing challenging career opportunities. Our people also experience a multi-cultural environment and diversity, work for a company that not only provides the infrastructure and resources to guarantee future success but also ensures that their work is appreciated and rewarded correspondingly.

What is your vision for the next five years?

We've mentioned a little about manufacturing, and R&D is certainly on the table as well. Of course there will also be growth in market access and presence in the country.

So where will Biogen Idec be in China in 2014?

In 2014 I not only would like to see Biogen Idec's innovative products helping a growing number of Chinese patients but I would also like see China and this region engaged in our global clinical development in a major way. I also envision a number of regional clinical development programs focusing on Asian diseases with high unmet medical needs.

On a more personal note, why did you take the position in China, and today, one year after starting the operation, what continues to motivate you?

In my previous roles, both at Biogen Idec and in other companies, I have been very fortunate to have the opportunity to build new business and new markets. China provides that type of opportunity again, yet in a whole new dimension.

It is a highly challenging environment, but then again, which environment is easy?

I am motivated by all the great opportunities within this country, my great team here in China and by the support of my colleagues across the globe. Together, we share a common vision of bringing innovative treatments to China and to integrating China into in our global activities. In other words, we are determined to improve health care and thus contribute to a more prosperous future for all.

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