Interview with Ming Fong Chen, Superintendent, National Taiwan University Hospital

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Tags: National Taiwan University Hospital

Could you start with an overview of the hospital's capabilities and areas of focus in 2010?

ming-fong-chen-superintendent.jpg

NTUH is a 2500 bed medical center and JCI accredited. We are a Centre of Excellence for clinical trials and clinical research in Asia Pacific. We ranked first in Taiwan and fifth in institutional ranking in clinical medicine in Asia Pacific. We focus on innovation, clinical research and clinical trials. We conduct more than a thousand clinical research projects and 500 clinical trials per year in this hospital. The majority of our clinical trials are international pharmaceutical companies' global NDA clinical trials. We are one of the largest sites that contributed the largest number of patients for many international clinical trials. The quality of our clinical trials is also ranked among the best by our sponsors. We also take leadership in many global clinical trials as chairmen of international clinical trials or advisory board members of international clinical trials. Many major international pharmaceutical companies select NTUH as their preferred partner in their international clinical trials.

What are the strengths that you put forward to attract the pharmaceutical industry and the clinical research organisations to NTUH over other centres of Excellence? What distinguishes you from the pack?

We attract major international pharmaceutical companies to select NTUH as their preferred partner in their global clinical trials by our outstanding clinical trial performance, top quality, fast speed, competitive cost and international clinical trial leadership. We recruited more than a thousand participants in some international clinical trials and was ranked as one of the largest sites that

contributed the largest number of patients by our sponsors. Our IRB is efficient and clinical trial approvals take about 4 weeks. In many international clinical trials, we put in the first patient worldwide and finished the total patient recruitment several months ahead of our sponsor's global timelines. The quality of our clinical trials is also ranked among the best internationally by our pharmaceutical sponsors. Our ICH-GCP compliance is repeatedly confirmed by independent clinical trial audits, EMEA and FDA inspections. We also take leadership in many global clinical trials as chairmen of many international clinical trials or steering committee members of international clinical trials. Because of our outstanding clinical trial performance, many major international pharmaceutical companies such as Pfizer, MSD, Novartis, GSK, Boehringer-Ingleheim etc. select NTUH as their preferred partner in their international clinical trials. We also receive extensive support from the Taiwan regulatory authorities to set up the only National Center of Excellence for Clinical Trial and Research in Taiwan to enhance our clinical trial excellence in Asia Pacific.

The healthcare sector has been highlighted by the Executive Yuan as one of the six key areas for economic and sustainable development. What are the implications for NTUH, especially as a state run medical centre, now that healthcare is a government priority?

The government puts a lot of resources in the healthcare sector. It is really important for us to promote innovative medical treatment and preventive medicine. NTUH receive extensive support from the Taiwan government to set up the National Center of Excellence for Clinical Trial and Clincal Research in Taiwan and to enhance our clinical trial competitiveness in Asia Pacific. NTUH recently received generous government funding for medical device development and clinical trials. The Taiwan government also provides extensive funding for new drug development. Furthermore, NTUH is conducting a monthly meeting with the Department of Health and other medical centres to work as a group to enhance clinical trials in Taiwan. We also give important input to the Taiwan government regarding national clinical trial regulation and strategy issues to facilitate clinical trials in Taiwan. For example, the Taiwan FDA has recently issued new guidelines to simply and speed up the regulatory approval of international clinical trials in Taiwan.

Your collaboration with hospitals is international. What business opportunities do you see with the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA)? As the superintendent of a university, how do you see your future relationship evolving with China?

We feel that it is an opportunity for Taiwan to move forward. We do have good working relationships with numerous doctors and Chinese medical centres in China. We expect the improvement of working relationship between Taiwan and China under ECFA in many areas will be a win-win situation. In the future, we anticipate the harmonization and mutual recognition of clinical trial data, NDA and new drug licenses. The general economic agreement between China and Taiwan has indeed been signed, but all conditions concerning the health care sector are still under

progress.

What is your opinion about the increasing health care expenditures? What would be the best way to fight the deficit?

The financial situation of the government is nowadays quite difficult. The deficit level is high and will increase, because the average age of the Taiwanese population is increasing and will require more expensive medical care, new drugs and equipments. However, hospitals are working very hard to fit the financial conditions and to stick to the state budget. Taiwan is trying to revise the the national health insurance system. One of the suggestions would be to adjust the proportion of the monthly premium to the salaries of the beneficiaries. From the medical point of view, it may be necessary to increase the rate of health insurance expenditures.

Is it harder to operate a public hospital as a business compared to the private hospitals. What is your opinion?

Government hospitals may be over-regulated. For example, purchasing of goods or services in a public hospital require complicated approval processes, which could limit the efficiency of its operation. Thus, the flexibility is much higher in private hospitals. However, despite the more complicated public hospital regulations, NTUH is still the number one medical center in Taiwan. We are also a Centre of Excellence for clinical trials and clinical research in Asia Pacific. Through the commitment of our senior management, the team work, innovation and clinical research of our medical staff, NTUH has demonstrated its ability to achieve clinical trial and research excellence, although it is a public hospital.

NTUH has a significant educative role. It is said that the best students in Taiwan go to the medical field. Do you feel that you benefit from the best people in your hospital? Is the workforce going abroad (US mainly) to work after receiving the diplomas?

NTUH has a significant educational role for the training of doctors. The best students in Taiwan go to study medicine the NTU College of Medicine because this is the most prestigious university in Taiwan. We do benefit from the best talents in our hospital. We also send many doctors overseas for training. Although the local salary may not be competitive with USA, Europe etc. Many doctors come back after the training and working experience abroad. Many of our best performing doctors in clinical trial, translational research and innovation did receive their overseas postgraduate training in the USA. They are the foundation of the National Center of Excellence for Clinical Trial and Research in NTUH.

Hospitals in Taiwan are in the position to connect the Taiwanese people to the latest innovations from pharmaceutical companies through clinical trials – how do you feel about this position, and how are you working to increase your work in clinical trials?

NTUH as a National Center of Excellence for Clinical Trial and Research do provide opportunities to our patients free of charge the access to the latest innovations or investigational new drugs through our pharmaceutical companies sponsored clinical trials. We comply with ICH-GCP to protect our patients. It may be a win-win situation for both the patients and the pharmaceutical industry. We increase our clinical trial activity through preferred-partner collaborations with the major pharmaceutical companies.

How does the hospital look for partnering with pharmaceutical companies and forge long-term links with the industry?

We look for international pharmaceutical companies that want to establish major clinical trial operation or new drug development in Asia Pacific as our potential partners. When we established our clinical trial performance record and set up the National Center of Excellence for Clinical Trial and Research, many partners come to us. We forge long-term links with the industry by signing formal agreement on our partnership.

What are your hopes for the future development of the hospital and for the future development of your links with the pharmaceutical industry?

As a National Center of Excellence for Clinical Trial and Research, we will aim at advancing our leadership in Asia Pacific. We will focus on medical innovation, translational research, clinical trials and our collaboration with the pharmaceutical industry in clinical drug development. We will expand our collaborations with the major pharmaceutical companies in more in translational research and early phase clinical trials in Asia Pacific..

Basing the activities of the National Taiwan University Hospital on innovation, do you see China as a potential market? Do you consider developing medical tourism in Taiwan?

We see China as the biggest and closest potential market for Taiwan innovative products such as new drugs, new biotech products or new medical devices. The Chinese ethnic origin, language, culture , diseases and medical need are similar or familiar to Taiwan.

Do you have a personal message that you want to deliver to the readers of Pharmaceutical Executive?

We are a Centre of Excellence for Clinical Trials and Clinical Research in Asia Pacific. Because of our outstanding clinical trial performance, many major international pharmaceutical companies such as Pfizer, MSD, Novartis, GSK, Boehringer-Ingleheim etc. select NTUH as their preferred partner in their international clinical trials.

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