Interview with Yong Taek Chang, Founder, Shin Poong Pharm

21.09.2009

Tags: Shin Poong Pharm

Could you please introduce Shinpoong, which you founded in 1962, and mention the main milestones of this unique company in the Korean pharmaceutical industry?

I founded Shinpoong in a very delicate and decisive time for Korea. During the civil war the population had to face serious epidemics, and by the end of the conflict there was an important lack of good pharmaceutical products in the country. This challenge provided us the opportunity to develop and deliver accessible products with a high quality, something extremely needed by the Korean population in the aftermath of the war. In 1975 we first synthesized ‘Mebendazole’ followed by another anthelmintic, ‘Praziquantel’ in 1983. Our products were soon considered the safest and most accessible on the market by the Korean National Government and respected organizations such as UNICEF and the WHO. In the early 2000s, the WHO and MMV (Malaria Medicine Venture) decided to cooperate with Shinpoong thanks to our cutting edge quality, manufacturing techniques and accessibility in terms of anti-malaria product synthesis. We are responsible for the manufacturing of the products and MMV is in charge of the clinical trials expenses. The aim is to make medicines accessible for more than 400 million people in the developing world suffering from malaria and its side effects. Our continued efforts and development have allowed Shinpoong to ultimately synthesize new anti-malarial agent called PYRAMAX using our own technique. The product has just finalized clinical trials, with an efficacy of over 99% and nearly no side effects.
When you created Shinpoong, Korea was an underdeveloped country just coming out of a

devastating war. Now it is one of the most important economies in the world and your company provides crucial medicines to people in need in many countries.

Did you have this type of vision for Shinpoong since the beginning?

My vision and goal have always been to provide high quality and accessible products on a large scale to those that need it the most, using our own techniques. With our new EU GMP compliant manufacturing facilities inaugurated in September 2008, Shinpoong now has the capacity to synthesize anti-malaria agents from raw materials to final products. So beginning 2009 we already count with a new factory and the clinical trials are done, leaving only the registration to finalize and this should not take long. Our success in expanding abroad is also thanks to the partnerships that we have established with foreign companies, since the1990s, through which they are authorized to manufacture our products and even export them to neighboring countries. Our first overseas presence was set up in 1988 in Sudan, a country in a region in great need of our products. Later on we have gone to establish ourselves in China in which our partner is responsible for the manufacturing and sales, as well as in Vietnam and Philippines where we are supplying the local markets' needs. Nowadays, Shinpoong exports finished products and raw materials to more than 40 countries.

We have received awards in acknowledgement of our exports which exceeded $20 million dollars in 2005. My aim is to further increase Shinpoong's activities in the developing world while establishing a greater presence in the more developed markets. After achieving important milestones both in the Korean and overseas developing markets, how do you plan to expand your business to the more challenging advanced countries like Europe and the US?

We have always considered that although it is important to maintain our business in Korea, a lot of our growth will come from further overseas operations. For the moment we have been successful in expanding to developing markets where there is a serious need for our products. However, our plans are to increase our presence in the more advanced countries as well. Our strategy is to initially establish R&D partnerships with leading companies in those markets and carry out clinical trials, which will eventually allow us to launch new products there. In Korea we have already developed a very unique product which can treat apoplexy and Alzheimer's disease with few side effects, and we look forward to initiating clinical trials in Europe and the United States. Shinpoong has recently signed a partnership with a company in Saudi Arabia. How promising you see the Middle East for your future growth? The Middle Eastern market, Saudi Arabia in particular, is very promising thanks to the increasing local demand and the fast expansion of its healthcare system. The decisive support from the Saudi government to build these facilities has also been very

important. They are encouraging the production of medicines at low prices, especially for the treatment of pesticides, malaria, antibiotics and other general medical supplies, making Shinpoong the partner of choice. This illustrates our contribution to the well-being of people in different regions of the world. Without this kind of partnership, the treatment of very serious diseases would be neglected in many developing nations. Shinpoong is helping to make sure that this does not happen. The Lee Myung-bak government has expressed concern about Korea's international image not being as strong as it should be, considering its economic and industrial importance.

What role do you think that the local pharmaceutical industry can play in improving Korea's image and prestige abroad?

After decades of struggle and sacrifices Korea has managed to build an advanced economy, whose main asset is its highly qualified and efficient workforce together with its cutting edge technology in many industrial fields. Therefore, the Korean pharmaceutical industry could serve the global community by using its unique assets for the production of advanced medicaments at reasonable prices, allowing universal access to basic and advanced treatments that can improve the lives of millions that are still unattended. When our country needed the world's help to stand up from the shadows of war we had it; now it's our turn to contribute to the development and well-being of humanity. Shinpoong's everyday work is driven by this ideal.

What are your expectations for Shinpoong's growth and development over the next 5 to 10 years?

Shinpoong's future growth is based on our further investments in R&D for the development of new drugs and on the expanding our reach to the populations in need of our medicines, such as those who still don't have access to proper treatment of apoplexy, Alzheimer's and heart diseases. The construction of our new plant of over 55,000 m2 at the Osong Biopark will enable our company to manufacture anti-cancer medicines from raw materials to final products. Finally, we would like to advance in our R&D partnerships in Europe and America since they will be a cornerstone of Shingpoong's status as a truly global pharmaceutical company.

After founding Shinpoong and leading it for nearly 5 decades, what is it that keeps you motivated to continue working with such passion today?

Sharing my vision with my employees and the recognition of Shinpoong's achievements have given us the strength and will to overcome the challenges and seize the opportunities that we have found along the way, constructing a trajectory of humanity and accomplishment. Knowing that our hard work improves directly the lives of so many people encourages us to keep working and building a better future. The recognition of our efforts from institutions such as the WHO, UNICEF and MMV

gives us the assurance that we are a force for the development and well-being of the world.

See more interviews