Interview: Ashok Bhattacharya – General Manager, Takeda India

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Ashok Battacharya, executive director of the Indian affiliate of Takeda Pharmaceuticals, with 38 years experience in global Ppharmaceutical MNCs, discusses the top-notch reputation that Takeda has among physicians and patients and how the company is working towards making Takeda's innovative medications available to Indian Patients.

Can you give our international readers a brief introduction to your background?

I joined the industry as a medical representative in Burroughs Wellcome, moving into marketing as a group product manager. When GSK and Wellcome merged I headed one of the business units in Glaxo-Wellcome. At GSK I used to head two businesses – one of them was the second largest business unit in GSK and the other function was setting up a chronic disease business unit, that is diabetes. From there, in 2009, I joined Merck Serono as VP of the commercial operations and in 2013 I joined Takeda in commercial operations & further assuming charge as an executive director in 2016.

It has been a very good journey so far all along working with multinational companies where the priorities have always been ethics and compliance following the IFPMA code of pharmaceutical marketing practices. Whatever I have been doing so far, I always kept in mind the patients as the center of everything. The belief that has been inculcated in me from the start is the very fact that we exist because of the patients. The objective of pharmaceutical companies is to discover

medications, fulfil unmet needs of physicians in terms of treating diseases and to alleviate the suffering of many patients all over the world.

How does Takeda work with patients and hospital associations (e.g. AHPI) as well as the training of medical professionals to provide more holistic care?

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Takeda is a research-based pharmaceutical company & every activity is planned & executed keeping the patient at the center. Takeda believes in disseminating evidence-based scientific knowledge to the medical fraternity & executes the same in a compliant & ethical fashion.

Oncology seems to be an area of focus for many MNCs as well as foreign governments everywhere we go, but we do not hear a lot of public debate regarding cancer care in India. What is your view on this?

I personally do not think that very little is being talked about with regards to oncology, as many of the leading companies – particularly the MNCs – have made big efforts in the area of oncology through disease awareness programs, early diagnosis, launching innovative targeted molecules & providing patient assistance programs. There are lot of NGOs working in the area of cancer to provide treatment assistance to the cancer patients. As a matter of fact, there are lot of joint efforts & initiatives being taken by the medical fraternity & the pharmaceutical companies to combat this dreadful disease & provide better quality of life to the patients.

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What is the affiliate's mission and what products have you launched so far?

The overall mission is to ensure that majority of Indian patients benefit from the Takeda's innovative medicines in a sustainable manner. The principle of the business model is that, on one hand, it has to be penetrative and on the other sustainable over time. I talk about sustainability because patient centricity is not a momentary focus it is a long term one.

In terms of products, we currently have one novel product called Tachosil®

At the end of the day, you cover therapeutic areas that other big MNCs like Ferring and Novartis deal with. What is your competitive edge in the country and what led Takeda to such high reputation here in India?

It is the innovative molecules that highlight Takeda’s reputation. Indian doctors get to know about Takeda’s innovative brands and molecules at various global scientific meetings and scientific publications. In addition to this, Japan has a special place in India and all Japanese companies are highly respected in the Indian market because of their quality and innovation.

What is your view on the current pricing landscape in India?

A lot is being discussed on this burning issue on various platforms not only in India but also in many other parts of the world. My personal view is to look at pricing more holistically since regulating medicine cost alone cannot reduce total healthcare cost, nor does it ensure complete affordable access to healthcare for the masses. Currently India holds the distinction of being pharmacy of the world, but the new vision is to be recognized as the innovation hub. In order to accomplish this vision, regulators need to look at pricing policies appropriately.

Takeda is the only Japanese company with a foreign president. How does this ‘uniqueness’ translate in India and through your management style and staff?

Indeed, this is unique. There is a lot of diversity within the organization & we truly believe in diversity and we encourage it. Takeda is a reputable, respectable, research driven, patient centric and honest organization which facilitates to further strengthen our brand in India. Every employee in india embraces this culture further strengthening the trust & reputation of Takeda in the country.

Where would you like to lead the Indian affiliate?

I want to ensure that majority of Indian patients benefit from Takeda’s innovative medicines in a sustainable manner and uphold the image of Takeda by ensuring better health & brighter future of the patients.

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