Daniel Thurley, GM, Roche Hong Kong & Macau



"The opportunities that Hong Kong offers within the healthcare and life sciences sector are unique globally."

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Dr. Daniel Thurley, general manager of Roche Hong Kong and Macau, shares his first impressions of the affiliate, the strategic significance of Hong Kong to Roche globally, the innovative medicines and technology Roche is committed to bringing to Hong Kong, and his insights on Roche's commitment to patient-centricity.

There have been significant milestones for Roche and Hong Kong in the past year, with global CEO Severin Schwan visiting the Hong Kong affiliate in 2017 and Hong Kong Chief Executive (CE) visiting Roche's global headquarters in Basel during her 2018 Switzerland trip. What does this indicate about the strategic significance of Roche Hong Kong?

The opportunities that Hong Kong offers within the healthcare and life sciences sector are unique globally. CE Carrie Lam's visit demonstrates the willingness and eagerness of the Hong Kong government when it comes to embracing innovation, bolstered by the recent announcement by the mainland Chinese government that Hong Kong will be China's international innovation and technology hub, acting as the gateway in and out of China for both foreign and domestic companies.

Roche has recently been described as a data company that happens to make medicine and diagnostics. Fundamentally we have always been – and will continue – to be led by our science and research & development (R&D). We are global leaders in personalized healthcare and diagnostics, and in particular, we have made great strides in the collection, analysis and integration of data

through our Diagnostics division platforms, supplemented by recent acquisitions of companies like Foundation Medicine and Flatiron Health. This will be transformative within the healthcare space and will position us to help countries make better healthcare decisions.

Regarding Big Data specifically, Hong Kong is able to leverage the public health data collected over many years by the Hospital Authority (Hong Kong's national public hospital authority). The HA data would be de-identified and controlled through an ethics review. CE Carrie Lam has previously indicated her willingness to allow access to this database, so for both Roche and the industry at large, I see great opportunities for industry, universities and government to work together to deliver better health outcomes.

I joined the Hong Kong affiliate as General Manager in May this year and my first impressions are of an amazing, committed team inspired by a great vision to deliver better healthcare in Hong Kong, so I am extremely excited about the journey ahead. Hong Kong has an amazing diversity of people and the melting pot of ideas and perspectives that creates is invaluable. I feel the creative energy in the air when I walk to work! This energy is what drives innovation.

Prior to joining Hong Kong, you were General Manager of Roche New Zealand. How do the two markets compare?

There are definitely many similarities as well as differences. Hong Kong and New Zealand both have excellent healthcare practitioners and researchers, and robust public health systems.

Hong Kong has nearly double New Zealand's population in 1/100th of the space: New Zealand has a land area of around 270,000 square kilometers while Hong Kong only has a land area of around 2,700 square kilometers. GDP per capita is more or similar, with both at around USD 40,000 per capita. New Zealand and Hong Kong have different tax rates. New Zealand is capped at 33 percent, and the copayment for all medicines in the public healthcare sector is under HKD 30 (USD 3.82). Hong Kong has opted for 17 percent capped taxes but much higher co-payments balance.

New Zealand also has its own regulator, while Hong Kong does not. Hong Kong registers a drug if it has received regulatory approval from two reference markets. This means that New Zealand conducts a full assessment of new drugs. The positive aspect of this is that New Zealand can use its own hospital and clinical trials data to change the drug licenses to allow access to patients in New Zealand if the data supports this. That said, Hong Kong is often faster to register new medicines.

Another difference relates to reimbursement. In New Zealand, as soon as a medicine is registered, people are able to purchase it. In Hong Kong, however, it has to be listed on the public formulary before patients can access them through Hospital Authority, which delays patient access to innovation.

As a global leader in healthcare, where do you see areas for Roche to contribute to Hong Kong's healthcare system to meet medical needs in this country?

Hong Kong is already doing a great job with their public healthcare delivery and processes, and the life expectancy here is in fact the highest in the world.

Nevertheless, there are still areas that I believe Roche can contribute. For instance, two of the largest killers in Hong Kong are cancer and pneumonia. Roche is a global leader in cancer treatment and a significant amount of our annual USD 9.9 billion investment into R&D goes towards oncology, from prevention, diagnosis, treatment to palliative care. In particular, we have seen great breakthroughs in cancer immunotherapies that we are extremely excited about bringing to Hong Kong and Macau patients. We have invested in Hong Kong in cancers that are more prevalent within the Asian, and especially, South Chinese populations.

I mentioned our strength in data earlier. Genomic analysis and next-generation sequencing are increasingly important tools in diagnosis and treatment to select the best treatment or drug for each patient. The most expensive medicine is one that does not work. Therefore, this is something that we hope to implement in Hong Kong as well.
Another focus is ensuring that new innovations within Roche's global portfolio, such as our exciting Alzheimer's drug currently within clinical trials, reach patients in Hong Kong as quickly as possible. We have a new product for influenza being assessed by regulators around the world, for instance, which is a significant medical need in Hong Kong as well.

The Hong Kong government is also starting to run pilot programs for community and primary care. This is strongly supported by the Hong Kong Association for the Pharmaceutical Industry (HKAPI), of which I am also a Board Member, and this offers opportunities for the industry to collaborate with the government to better manage common ailments and chronic diseases like diabetes within the community.

More generally, I hope to see more willingness from the government to embrace public-private partnerships within healthcare, which would provide a great opportunity to leverage the respective strengths of government and the private sector to promote better patient outcomes.

With such a great healthcare ecosystem, how is Roche investing in clinical trials in Hong Kong?

Roche has always invested significantly in clinical trials in Hong Kong. In 2017, over 630 patients were enrolled in studies across areas of high unmet medical need like triple negative breast cancer, bladder cancer and liver cancer. Hong Kong has high-quality and world-renowned doctor-clinicians so we want to continue to leverage this.

At the same time, as an industry, HKAPI is hoping to work with the Hong Kong government closely to further enhance Hong Kong's strengths in clinical trials. We have proposed a long-term strategic goal for Hong Kong to have 10 percent of patients enrolled in clinical trials ten years from now. The current figure is under 0.1 percent. To facilitate this, we have made suggestions to the Food & Health Bureau. Firstly, it should establish an independent clinical trials unit within Hospital Authority, which should be seen as an integral part of healthcare service delivery rather as just part of the Risk and Safety Department, as it is now.

We are also suggesting to streamline the ethics and regulatory approval process, as at the moment, Hong Kong has many ethics committees under the Hospital Authority, where the process in the UK is centralized and streamlined. Centralization in Hong Kong will greatly increase the speed of ethics approval. Mainland China has already stated a target of providing ethics and regulatory approval for trials within 30 days, so Hong Kong can perhaps benefit from a similar measure. What would also help is if approval of clinical trials within Hong Kong can then allow patient recruitment from across the Greater Bay Area, so that the trials can recruit from a population of over 66 million people instead of just seven million! We also hope that conducting clinical trials in Hong Kong will accelerate the registration and enlistment processes for these drugs afterwards. All these measures will further increase Hong Kong's attractiveness as a clinical trials hub.

Roche's tagline is 'doing now what patients need next'. How have you seen this patient-centricity within the Roche Hong Kong affiliate?

I have been very impressed with the Roche Hong Kong team, who are an incredibly innovative, fun-loving bunch that are committed to going above and beyond to help patients access innovative medicines.

Roche Hong Kong invests in various programs. For instance, our medicinal support programs cover a wide range of diseases from rheumatoid arthritis to various types of cancer. Every year, we provide over HKD 100 million to ensure patients receive access to our medicines. We also organize

disease awareness programs to help people understand the best ways to look after themselves. We also have a dedicated phone line to support patients with questions about our medicines.

More recently, we have taken a strong initiative to bring patients into our decision-making processes to share their experiences, needs, and to help decide our priorities for the coming months. We have dedicated staff within the organization to further amplify the patient voice, and we work extremely closely with various NGOs across Hong Kong.

Roche is still a majority family-owned company and that is why this family culture is pervasive through the global Roche organization. We are all passionate about being driven by the science and R&D in our work, and linking that to the emotional drive to make the world a better place.

My role as General Manager is to provide clear guidance to my team about why we are here. Patients are waiting urgently for our products and it is our duty to bring innovative medicines to them as quickly as possible. This also means giving our employees the freedom to experiment, test new ideas and offer creative solutions.

Having spent 13 years with Roche, what insights would you like to share?

Keep your eyes open for possibilities. I trained to be a consultant physician at the University of Cambridge so I actually started my career as a medical doctor and have first-hand experience with patients. I am glad that I joined Roche 13 years ago to incorporate my understanding of patients' needs into my leadership positions with Roche.
You spend a third of your life asleep and another third at work, so hopefully you enjoy your job as much as I do! Roche places a high emphasis on talent development, helping staff to discover their true capabilities and potentials. Know what you are good at and use your strengths to the best of your abilities in a job you enjoy. 13 years and counting now with Roche and it has been an amazing journey. Finally, teach yourself to never stop learning and actualize your potential!

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