Colman Chan – CEO, Skyview Optical, Hong Kong



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Colman Chan, CEO of ophthalmology specialist Skyview Optical, outlines recent developments in the Hong Kong eyecare market, Skyview's evolution as a distributor and how it can foster greater links with Mainland China.

What have been some of Skyview Optical's main achievements and milestones since its establishment?

Since creating the company three decades ago in 1987, we have continuously brought to Hong Kong new advances in technology and instruments that help to enhance the standards of the ophthalmic and optical market.

Looking at some examples of this, in 2002, we brought the Nidek Non-Contact Tonometer to Hong Kong, which is an efficient device used to measure the intraocular pressure of the eye. This device became popular at the start of the new millennium due to its fast and easy operation. In addition, it saves valuable time, not only for the doctors but also for the patients, because it eliminates the need to use a local anesthetic, which had previously been the method of choice for the procedure before.

Following on from this device's success, we introduced to Hong Kong the Nidek Microkeratome in 2003. We saw a high demand for this product in the country due to its ability to create a precise and consistent corneal flap, essential for laser eye surgery.

One of the most interesting instruments we distribute in the country is an innovative camera, the Nidek AFC-230 Non-Mydiratic Fundus Camera, used to screen for diabetic mellitus in patients. In 2010, government hospitals were conducting a big campaign for diabetic patients. During this time, they were screening for diabetic retina, which leads to blindness in diabetic patients, so there was a great need for this product.

More recently, Skyview Optical introduced to Hong Kong a surgical device for the treatment of glaucoma, which is the main cause of vision impairment, second only to Cataract. This device, known as CLASS (Carbon Dioxide Laser Assisted Sclerectomy Surgery), uses a very simple surgical procedure, which helps to lower the intraocular pressure in the eye of a glaucoma patient. The main advantage of this device is that it is a safe and effective non-penetrating glaucoma surgery, further emphasizing the role Skyview Optical plays in bringing ground-breaking advances to the market, and thus our position at the forefront of patient care in Hong Kong.

Looking forward, with regards to new technologies, we will focus our efforts on devices that combat dry eye disease. This is a hot topic. Almost 60 percent of people in Hong Kong suffer from this disease, mainly from wearing contact lenses or due to old age.

What have been the main changes in the eye care industry?

Overall, the main change has been the shift from a subjective to an objective landscape i.e from manual to an automatic, predominately through the introduction of IT elements. As the ophthalmic and optical market has evolved, it has undergone more accurate and precise surgery through the introduction of advanced high technology diagnostic instruments. These instruments can give better results in measuring key elements of the eye and have enabled doctors to create better treatment plans for the patient.

At Skyview Optical, we constantly strive to provide a strong quality of service to our customers. Therefore, in light of advances in technology, we aim to create an IT or web-platform for the benefit of our customers, so they can get the latest information on new products and technologies that we are bringing to the market. Computer technology and big data is the future, and so we intend to be a part of this.

What are the main challenges Skyview is currently facing as a distributor?

The main challenge is to remain competitive against other brands of optical instruments. Currently, in Hong Kong, we do not have very strict, mandatory regulations for importing medical devices, allowing practically everyone the opportunity to import, without the need for FDA or CE Mark

approval. This creates a strong competitive landscape.

However, this could be set to change with the recent proposed changes to the Hong Kong medical devices listing regime, so we will work closely with the manufacturers and developers looking to enter the Hong Kong market to ensure their innovative products can continue to reach our customers. Furthermore, we will continue to build strong relationships with all the key stakeholders involved and maintain current working relationships for the benefit of both the company and our customers.

In order to remain competitive, we must be able to balance the price against the quality of the product. Therefore, we look to strengthen the quality of our service, whether this is before or after the closing of the sale. This is achieved through searching for innovative and effective instruments to enhance the individual's service quality, in addition to approaching our customers with an analysis of the ophthalmic and optical market to keep them updated on key trends.

Finally, as a distributor, we can distinguish ourselves from multinational eyecare companies and brands due to our flexibility. Skyview Optical can provide various different brands of instruments and introduce new products much faster than MNCs. We can adjust our strategic and marketing plans more efficiently than big companies, who are less agile and less able to adapt as quickly to the market landscape. This enables Skyview to respond more quickly and effectively to changes in the market.

How does Skyview Optical determine the best products to introduce to the Hong Kong market based on market needs?

As an optometrist by trade, I understand the technicalities of the market. This means I can personally filter through available products and see what will be useful for my customers in the country. Moreover, I am lucky enough to have the opportunity to travel around the world, attending key events and congresses to witness first-hand the new trends and innovation in the eyecare industry, such as the World Ophthalmology Congress in Barcelona most recently. The team and I are always in a constant process of discussion and evaluation, considering what devices and instruments are suitable for the Hong Kong market.

Contrary to what some manufacturers believe, not everything they have to offer is effective here. Over the past thirty years, we have built up the optimum experience to evaluate what instruments are practical. We can imagine how a product works with the end user in mind and thus we strive to work with the manufacturers and advise them. Especially considering some of the small spaces many doctors and optometrists work in, due to the expensive rents here, we must be creative in

this regard and find machines and instruments that are adapted to this parameter. This is done by exploring all the advantages and disadvantages of devices we wish to introduce. Thus, many doctors welcome our explanations.

We are well respected throughout the value chain and have been recognized by Optomed, a Finnish Company which awards excellence in the eye care sector every year, who awarded Skyview Optical the title of ‘best Sales and Marketing team’ two years running, in 2016 and 2017.

Who are your main customers?

Skyview Optical operates in both Hong Kong and Macau, with a small office of four in mainland China. We have the capabilities and network to work in both the public and the private sectors. Our work with the government has stretched for many decades, and they appreciate our attitude towards business. Moreover, the private sector has benefited from Skyview introducing many successful new products to the country, thereby improving their quality of service.

How can Skyview Optical capitalize on the Greater Bay Area initiative, with its aim to make Hong Kong as an innovation hub?

Hong Kong is a pioneer for bringing innovative devices to mainland China. However, I feel that China is always chasing the new technologies from other foreign countries. Nevertheless, there is a tight transfer of information from Hong Kong to mainland China which helps in the eyecare field, with the latter looking to Hong Kong to bring new machines and technologies to their doorstep. However, mainland China has its own regulatory system, which can be viewed as being stricter than the US FDA, so there are some constraints on what innovative products we can offer to them.

Where do you envision Skyview Optical in five years’ time?

Hong Kong professionals are well trained, and they will continue to welcome new and innovative devices that enhance their daily practice and quality of service, so we will continue to spend our time aiding in this endeavor. Many professionals in the ophthalmic and optical market have concerns and demand for safety and effectiveness, so we will strive to act as a bridge between the optical instrument manufacturers and Hong Kong optometrists, to provide the best instruments and deliver the best treatments.

Furthermore, I hope to continue sharing my ideas with manufacturers, creating new and more innovative solutions for the patients of Hong Kong. One of my many ideas stems from the use of VR technology in relation to visual field testing. This test is used to spot a weakness in the retina. However, the testing is sometimes difficult to use for old people. Currently, the device involves

clicking a responder when they see a flashing light. From my experience, many old people do not fully understand what is being asked of them, get confused when using the clicker or sometimes is too slow to respond, which give inaccurate results. My idea is that testing should be automatic, and by now we should be able to detect automatically whether the brain has responded to a light flash or whether the patient has issues with their visual function. I understand that there is a lot of research still to be conducted in this area, but I hope ideas like this, together with close cooperation between government, healthcare providers, manufacturers and distributors like Skyview Optical, will continue to advance the technologies we have and make eye care more efficient and user-friendly.

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