Marine Queniart-Stojanovic – GM General Medicines Thailand, Malaysia & Singapore, Sanofi

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Industry veteran Marine Queniart-Stojanovic outlines the significance of the Thailand-Malaysia-Singapore country grouping to Sanofi's APAC operations; how the company's global rationalisation and prioritisation push has been reflected at the country level; and why inter-stakeholder collaboration will be crucial to developing patient-centric solutions in a post-pandemic world.

Could give us a brief overview of your career trajectory up to this point and how you draw on it in your current role?

I think of myself as a global citizen with a French passport. I am passionate about healthcare delivery and improving patient outcomes, particularly through data and innovation, which has driven me throughout my career in pharma and at Sanofi. My experience to date has combined both commercial leadership like General Manager positions with roles leading innovation, where I have led patient-health services, and digital and multichannel transformation. In both global and local roles, I have worked across a number of different countries in three continents with time spent in both emerging and mature markets and, as a people person, I love connecting people and working together with my team to deliver the best possible healthcare solutions for patients.

Today, you oversee Sanofi's operations in Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore. What is the remit of this role and the significance of this country grouping to Sanofi?

In this role I have a dual responsibility. The first is as country lead for 'One Sanofi' across the Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore local affiliates, overseeing the One Sanofi presence in these markets both externally and internally. Sanofi has different global business units, but we are looking to operate together under one guiding philosophy. On my team I have transversal teams working on commercial support, public affairs, market access, and commercial excellence.

My other responsibility is as general manager for Sanofi's General Medicines business in these markets, with a direct P&L responsibility. General Medicines represents Sanofi's core portfolio, particularly in Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore, where the burden of chronic diseases is extremely significant.

To what extent do Sanofi's operations in these markets mirror the company's global structure?

We now mirror the global organisation with four global business units – General Medicines, Vaccines, Specialty Care, and Consumer Healthcare. For General Medicines, our overall objective is to reverse the course of the chronic disease epidemics by 2030 through transforming healthcare. We are looking to drive better diabetes management and really be a leader across the therapeutic areas where Sanofi can make a difference and improve chronic disease patient outcomes. Sanofi is also transforming its business model, both in terms of moving from being a provider of medicines to one of healthcare solutions, as well as innovating on route to market and how we create a personalised experience for healthcare professionals.

Sanofi has been in a transformation period in recent years. How is this reflected in your region?

These global movements help ensure that Sanofi can concentrate on the areas in which it can make the most difference to patients. In mature markets, we can have the biggest impact in the specialty care and vaccines areas. However, in emerging markets like Thailand and Malaysia the biggest pain points and the real needs of patients are still in chronic diseases. For example, diabetes is still a huge issue with unmet needs and a burden in our countries and therefore remains a focus and a growth area

Where we are completely aligned with global strategy is looking at how best to allocate and prioritise resources to have the biggest impact on patients in a local context. For us, that is in diabetes, cardiovascular, thrombosis, and a few other key therapeutic areas. At the same time, our specialty care and vaccines business units are also very active here.

Given that Singapore is a leading country in the region in terms of bringing new innovative medicines to market, how do you manage it in tandem with Thailand and Malaysia? What are the opportunities and challenges inherent in this grouping?

We manage this multi country organisation almost as one integrated country; our team works across all three markets and builds on the inherent synergies. Although execution and speed to market differs from country to country, the needs of patients and customers as well as the overall strategic challenges are quite similar. The Thailand-Singapore-Malaysia grouping was made with that in mind. These three countries are very different from each other culturally, but from an access standpoint there are some commonalities compared to the rest of Asia in terms of eagerness for innovation and a booming middle class.

Of course, Thailand needs to be tackled differently to Singapore; where new product registrations happen much more quickly, making it a great platform to launch products and pilot new innovations. However, Malaysia and Thailand are also reasonably quick in approving innovation. Moreover, these countries have much larger populations, meaning that patient needs are also much larger.

How affected has Sanofi’s regional business been by the drop in visits to doctors and medical tourism over the past year and a half brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic?

The past 18 months have been both challenging and transformative. Some of the issues we have faced – such as the drop in medical tourism – are common to all three countries and probably to most Asia countries. Chronic disease patients have been less well followed, which has the potential to lead to a kind of second pandemic. Some patients have been getting six-month prescriptions instead of the usual three-month prescription with a consultation, leading to a drop in the quality of patient follow-up, fewer changes in treatments, and therefore inertia.

The private sector has suffered much more than the public sector in general, which has been a challenge for patients, but also for healthcare professionals and the pharma industry. However, we have seen a rapid acceleration of the transformation we had initiated on customer engagement, including remote health management and engagement, an increase in remote consultations, and some real traction in digital health. At Sanofi, we have made sure that we looked into those patient pain points and supported our customers with a more integrated, holistic approach to patient management.

Might COVID-19 prove to be an inflection point in terms of digitalisation in pharma and healthcare? What do you see as the emerging trends that will generate the biggest impact?

The widely repeated joke that COVID-19 is the best chief digital officer is as true for healthcare as it is for many other sectors. I have been working on digitalisation for many years including technology-assisted disease management and multichannel engagement. Indeed, I have probably been guilty of pushing these projects too early at certain points, where the technology was not yet at a level to match our ambitions.

Healthcare was already transforming, but at too slow a pace. The past 18 months has triggered an acceleration of this transformation and even the biggest sceptics now understand that patients' needs can be better met with data and technology.

On digitalisation, the real inflection point is not just filling the gaps of not being able to meet face to face, but rather the added value of data in connecting healthcare stakeholders and creating a more beneficial ecosystem for patients. Sanofi had already started its customer engagement transformation within our businesses in this part of the world and adoption of digital tools is now accelerating among our sales teams. Our aim now is to truly leverage data to provide the information that our teams needs when, and how they want it.

How important are digital tools in contexts like Thailand and Malaysia which have large, remote areas and where access can be a challenge?

Clearly, remote engagement brings additional value in large counties with big rural areas compared to smaller countries like Singapore where the infrastructure is more developed. Both Thailand and Malaysia have been utilising a fairly traditional commercial model up until now, with

great cultural emphasis placed on relationship building and face to face engagement. However, both countries are amongst the most digitally engaged in terms of people's personal and social lives, which represents a huge opportunity. Our digital efforts have taken off very quickly in these geographies, with our teams and their customers increasingly cognizant on the value to be leveraged from multichannel engagement. As we move out of the pandemic period, it will be interesting to see which parts of this remote engagement period stick in the longer term.

In the absence of a Sanofi vaccine against COVID-19, how have you managed expectations around the company's role in fighting the pandemic and what other COVID-related projects has Sanofi been engaged in your region?

Our primary focus as a local operating company has been ensuring that patient access to all of our medicines and vaccines is maintained. Sanofi's industrial affairs organisation, both globally and regionally, has done an amazing job in ensuring no break of supply, despite the challenges we faced. Secondly, our commercial teams have been fantastic at maintaining their connections with customers and ensuring our bridge to patients is maintained and that doctors are provided with correct information. As a leadership team, we have concentrated on how we can enable our staff to fulfil these important tasks, while taking care of their physical and mental health.

In parallel, Sanofi has been working globally on vaccine development to help meet the enormous global need. No single company or vaccine will be able to meet this demand alone, so we have been heartened by the large number of players joining the vaccine field. We will continue to ready our existing global footprint to support the manufacturing of any future Sanofi COVID vaccines and maximise the number of doses available.

Just recently, there have been some very positive developments within Sanofi. A Phase III trial for one of our vaccine candidates has begun and we intend to make this product available by Q4 2021, pending regulatory approval. Although vaccination rates are encouraging in developed nations such as Singapore, the USA, and much of Western Europe, only 10-15 percent of the global population has received a first dose. Given the unpredictability of COVID variants, there is a need to remain humble and continue working on solutions.

Additionally, Sanofi has mobilised its industrial affairs network to support the production of other vaccines due to the global supply challenges that are being faced.

As country speaker for the world's biggest vaccine company, have you had to fend off a lot of questions about Sanofi's role in fighting this crisis and why it has, as yet, been unable to bring a vaccine to market?

There has been a lot of speculation over the last 18 months. However, we have been consistent in saying that which individual vaccines or treatments have been approved is not important; until everybody is vaccinated, no-one is safe.

Personally, I have been particularly proud to see Sanofi and GSK join forces to create a solution early in the process and showcase a real focus on patients. I am very happy to see that those efforts are now starting to bear fruit.

Sanofi has been the recipient of a number of 'Great Place to Work' awards in the region. Given your diverse background and experiences as well as the diversity within your three markets, what kind of company culture are you looking to build?

We want a culture that walks the talk and is supported by a clear and shared set of beliefs and values. However, this culture should also be very pragmatic and connect to our overall strategy.

Sanofi's 'Play to Win' strategy supports our culture in terms of stretching beyond, taking action without being told, acting for the interests of patients and customers, and thinking Sanofi first in our actions. These cornerstones have now become a common language and our people have responded really well to leaders telling stories and giving example of them. This then becomes a story-based culture of what we value in terms of behaviour as opposed to a PowerPoint presentation or poster on a wall. Beyond that, our culture is about showing up as your best possible self and being accepted for who you are, with the right intentions.

What are the strengths and weaknesses of teams in your region?

We have a very diverse team with around 20 nationalities represented from Asia and beyond. Additionally, there is a lot of diversity within these countries themselves. From my perspective, Singapore, Thailand, and Malaysia offer a great mixture of respectfulness and emotional sensitivity. Building relationships is especially important in Thailand, whereas concise, direct, and transactional interactions are the name of the game in Singapore and Malaysia.

More importantly, our teams across the three countries are encouraged to work together and share expertise with the aim of getting the best of all worlds. Some of our teams need to be bolder and less risk averse, while others may benefit from a more mindful, and rounded approach. However, this is often dependent on individual personalities.

One of my team members was telling me how impressed he was when the first day of Ramadan coincided with Songkran in Thailand and the last day with three Indian festivals and the entire office was congratulating one another with a great deal of cultural and personal sensitivity. I have never seen such diversity and inclusion anywhere else, and I find it extremely rewarding to work in such an environment.

How would you characterise Sanofi's approach to external stakeholder collaboration in your managed markets?

I always come back to the question of how we help as many patients as possible access the healthcare solutions they need. Within this push, collaboration and cross functional teamwork in the healthcare environment is becoming increasingly important. We work with healthcare professionals, but also patient groups, and government authorities in the form of public-private partnerships. Collaborating with all these stakeholders on a variety of topics is part of our everyday job. For example, we have worked with various patient groups and authorities to define rare disease policies, raise awareness of the diabetes burden, and tackle mental health challenges in Singapore, Thailand, and Malaysia. Our aim is to work with both public and private partners to move the needle on these crucial issues.

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