

Boosting Public Health

How Global Pharmaceutical Giants are Transforming Malaysia's Vaccine Landscape

By: Dr. Choon Wai Yee



Multinational innovative pharmaceutical companies have been creating a lot of buzz lately in Malaysia's vaccine landscape, significantly contributing to public health by addressing vaccine-preventable diseases (VPDs). GlaxoSmithKline Pharmaceutical (GSK), a global biopharma company, is one of the key players in this effort. Through various initiatives, the company emphasises the importance of vaccinations as a foundation for building immunity, particularly in infants and young children.

Working closely with healthcare professionals and medical institutions nationwide, GSK engages community leaders to ensure that people know the importance of vaccination. The National Immunisation Programme (NIP) was designed based on the World Health Organisation (WHO) Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI) in 1974, which initially recommended immunisation against six diseases. Like most countries, Malaysia expanded its NIP to 12 major childhood VPDs, including Haemophilus influenzae type B, hepatitis B and pertussis (also known as whooping cough). Despite the Immunisation Schedule of the NIP in Malaysia being provided free of charge at all government healthcare facilities, the country has seen a rise in VPDs over the last few years.

At the recent launch of 'The Protector' website, GSK vaccines medical director Dr. Fonseka highlighted how vaccinations provide substantial benefits not only to individuals but also to society by bolstering community immunity. He pointed out that demographic changes and shifting disease burdens necessitate new vaccination strategies, especially for adults. To bridge the vaccination gap, 'The Protectors' website is aimed at educating Malaysians about VPDs, their transmission, symptoms, and health impacts. The website is part of GSK's broader mission to positively impact the health of 2.5 billion people over the next decade by supplying more than 20 vaccines to over 120 countries.

Arrival of MSD's new 15-valent pneumococcal vaccine, Vaxneuvance, in Malaysia

Another pharmaceutical giant, Merck Sharp & Dohme (MSD), recently introduced its 15-valent pneumococcal conjugate vaccine, Vaxneuvance, in Malaysia, extending protection against additional serotypes 22F and 33F. Approved by the Drug Control Authority (DCA) for a broad age range, this vaccine promises to enhance the fight against invasive pneumococcal diseases, which are a significant health concern in Malaysia. Pneumococcal disease, a leading cause of various infections like pneumonia and meningitis, poses a serious threat, especially to young children and older adults.

The introduction of Vaxneuvance follows years of rigorous research and clinical trials, demonstrating robust immune responses against all 15 serotypes covered by the vaccine. At the media launch on April 25, Dr. Abdullahi Sheriff, managing director of MSD Singapore, Malaysia, and Brunei, underscored the importance of making this vaccine widely available in Malaysia, aligning with MSD's mission to save and improve lives. The significant prevalence of pneumonia in Malaysian children under five and its status as the second leading cause of death across all age groups further emphasize the need for such vaccines.

First dengue vaccine launched in Malaysia

Another significant milestone in Malaysia's vaccine landscape is the introduction of Takeda Pharmaceuticals Malaysia's dengue tetravalent vaccine, Qdenga. Officially launched on June 11, the vaccine is designed to protect against all four dengue virus serotypes, addresses the pressing issue of dengue fever, which has seen a sharp increase in cases in recent years. Approved by the DCA, Qdenga requires two doses at a three-month interval and can be administered to individuals aged four and above. Takeda Malaysia & Singapore's country general manager, Dr. Lynette Moey, notes the heavy toll of dengue fever, particularly in Asia, and emphasizes the urgency of collective efforts to combat this health threat.

The impact of these vaccines is profound, not only in preventing diseases but also in reducing healthcare costs associated with treating severe infections. For instance, pneumococcal vaccination, which is part of Malaysia's National Immunisation Programme (NIP), helps prevent hospital admissions and intensive care stays for pneumonia, a common consequence of the disease.

Overall, the contributions of pharmaceutical companies like GSK, MSD, and Takeda are instrumental in enhancing Malaysia's vaccine landscape. Efforts from innovative biopharma companies in developing and distributing innovative vaccines, educating the public, and collaborating with healthcare providers ensure that Malaysians are better protected against a range of preventable diseases, thereby improving public health outcomes in Malaysia.

Prior to joining UiTM, Dr. Choon Wai Yee was an academic and health economics researcher at Monash University Malaysia. She sat on various advisory boards for pharmaceutical companies and served as the Scientific Advisor for the Pharmaceutical Association of Malaysia (PhAMA), focusing on Health Technology Assessment and Clinical Research committees. Her passion lies in improving patient access to potentially life-saving innovative medicines in Malaysia.



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