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AstraZeneca And Sunway Launch Malaysia's First Health Innovation Hub

By CodeBlue | 09 April 2021

The Malaysia hub will support start-ups of the Digital Health Innovation Challenge to drive innovative digital solutions in health care.



The MoU signing ceremony marking the launch of the first Health Innovation Hub in Malaysia.

KUALA LUMPUR, April 9 – AstraZeneca, a science-led biopharmaceutical company, has entered into a new partnership with Sunway University via its innovation arm, Sunway Innovation Labs (Sunway iLabs), to establish the first Health Innovation Hub (HIH) in Malaysia. The Hub is part of the AstraZeneca A.Catalyst Network, an interconnected global network of more than 20 AstraZeneca health innovation hubs.

In line with the Malaysian government's call for digital innovation in the health care sector, the Hub will empower local start-ups and innovators to deliver new, sustainable solutions which will bolster the treatment of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and support the patient experience, starting at the primary-care level.

The partnership was formalised by a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signing ceremony between both parties and was witnessed by guests of honour Dr Hishamshah Ibrahim, Deputy Director General, Health (Research & Technical Support), Ministry of Health and Dag Juhlin-Dannfelt, Ambassador of Sweden. Khairy Jamaluddin, Minister of Science, Technology, and Innovation delivered the keynote address virtually at the event.

In Malaysia, the rapid surge in the number of patients with NCDs has presented itself as one of the biggest challenges to the local health care system. According to the National Health and Morbidity Survey 2019, NCDs accounted for 71 per cent of premature deaths.

This is further compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic, which has amplified the risk of these patients developing complications and dying as a result of the virus. Statistically, Covid-19 patients with NCDs fare worse than others, with over 85 per cent of those who have died in Malaysia having pre-existing conditions such as diabetes and hypertension.

Dr Sanjeev Panchal, Country President, AstraZeneca Malaysia said, "As a biopharmaceutical company, we have a vital role to play in supporting Malaysia's battle against NCDs by strengthening our primary care ecosystem with solutions beyond the pill. With a robust ecosystem in place, we can address the prevalence of NCDs, better support the patient experience and enable digital health innovation."

"By allowing digital technology into health care, we are able to solve healthcare problems 'beyond the pill' by providing digital solutions that are affordable, universal, high-quality and patient-centric. This creates unique experiences for patients which ultimately delivers more powerful healthcare over the longer term."

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“With the establishment of the Health Innovation Hub (HIH) in Malaysia, AstraZeneca aims to create partnerships with local healthcare innovators and provide them with the platform and tools needed to build sustainable ecosystems and further drive digital health innovation. This is aligned with the government’s priorities to integrate new technologies into patient pathways to combat the impact of NCDs,” Dr Sanjeev further explained.

Malaysia’s hub will be part of AstraZeneca’s A.Catalyst Network, bringing together digital, R&D and commercial resources to improve patient outcomes. The Malaysia hub is the tenth hub launched in Emerging Markets, together with the hubs located in Russia, Brazil, Argentina, India, Singapore and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, as well as mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong.

Through the A.Catalyst Network, AstraZeneca is co-creating challenge-based solutions with and for patients, and working with partners to establish integrated healthcare systems that benefit the whole patient experience — from prevention and awareness, diagnosis and treatment to post-treatment and wellness.

Speaking at the launch, Jeffrey Cheah, Founder and Chairman, Sunway Group said, “The number of Malaysians affected by NCDs is rising each year and with the Covid-19 pandemic, affected patients are now exposed to even higher risks. The HIH is another initiative to advance our goal of positioning Sunway City Kuala Lumpur as a living laboratory. It will form a part of our sustainable smart city ecosystem that fosters collaboration between the private sector, academia, civil society and engender research and innovation aimed at solving real-world problems in real time.”

Matt Van Leeuwen, Chief Innovation Officer of Sunway Group and Director of Sunway iLabs said, “The HIH joint initiative by Sunway iLabs and AstraZeneca is well aligned with Sunway iLabs’ vision to become ASEAN’s leading integrated innovation platform that inspires people to design, test and launch sustainable solutions for a better future. Together with AstraZeneca, we look forward to drive healthcare solutions and innovations that will impact lives.”

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The primary-care level remains the first point of contact for most patients in Malaysia. Statistics show that 8.1 per cent of the population have visited an outpatient centre within the past two weeks, and approximately 64.3 per cent of these visits was in the public health care sector. (<https://codeblue.galencentre.org/>)

By introducing innovation and digital technology early on in the patient journey, a larger patient pool can be reached and this can enable them to play an active role in their own healthcare.

According to Dr Sanjeev, the use of technology has shown to get patients engaged and be more proactive when it comes to their own health.

Digital tools such as sensors, wearable devices and apps allow people to monitor their health, engage with health care practitioners and share data more easily.

This further empowers patients and opens up a new world of integrated healthcare, in which AstraZeneca has an important role to play.

As a prelude to the HIH in Malaysia, a Digital Health Innovation Challenge was launched earlier this year inviting start-ups registered in Malaysia to solve health care challenges through new technologies and digital healthcare solutions.

It was aimed at serving as a catalyst for the development of new patient-centric solutions while providing a platform for local innovators to showcase their work and potentially draw investments for their high-potential projects.

Under this programme, the selected start-ups will have access to the state-of-the-art hub at Sunway iLabs as a testbed for their solutions. These entrepreneurs will be connected to resources across Sunway's ecosystem of 13 business divisions, such as Sunway Medical Centre, and global partners through its open-innovation approach.

Additionally, these local start-ups will also have access to AstraZeneca's A.Catalyst Network of global health innovation hubs which will connect them with the talent and expertise from different hubs around the globe.

Commenting on the programme, Dr Sanjeev said, "The innovation challenge is a great example of how we partner with various stakeholders to identify solutions that can empower NCD patients and high-risk communities to proactively reduce their risk factors of these diseases through increased accessibility to digital tools that enable self-care and monitoring."

The Digital Health Innovation Challenge was a collaboration between Team Sweden comprising the Embassy of Sweden, Business Sweden and AstraZeneca, and partners, Sunway iLabs, Malaysian Global Innovation and Creativity Centre (MaGIC) and Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC).

The winners of the Digital Health Innovation Challenge included eight Malaysian start-ups, namely CoBlix Asia Ventures, Cygen Group, DATA8, Doktor Aku, Fitxscapes, Mimosa Medica, Naluri Hidup and Ourcheckup.

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