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Douglas Thomson, CEO, SingVax

Singapore's first vaccine development company, SingVax, focuses on developing prophylactic vaccines for infectious diseases of relevance to the Asia Pacific region and aims to be the partner of choice for vaccine companies seeking to access the Asia Pacific vaccine market.

Led by its CEO, Douglas Thomson, SingVax has two products under development – a Japanese Encephalitis (JE) vaccine and an Enterovirus 71 (EV71) vaccine. The company has adopted a product-focused approach and is looking out for partners to help commercialize the products. In an interview with BioSpectrum, Thomson outlines how far SingVax has come since its launch in 2005 and the road ahead.

What prompted you to set up SingVax?

SingVax's other founder, Joseph Santangelo and myself saw the market need for vaccines for infectious diseases prevalent in the Asia Pacific region, and this was the main driver for setting up SingVax.

How far has SingVax come since its launch in 2005?

SingVax has made significant accomplishments since its launch. These include:

- Establishing of world-class biologics development capabilities.
- Appointing a Board of Directors, led by John Brown (director on CAT, Ardana, Protherics and Onyvac among others) and a Scientific Advisory Board, led by Prof David Rowlands.
- Establishing SingVax as an authority in the region for vaccines. SingVax staff gets regularly invited to speak on panels concerning Asia, including this year's Phacilitate Vaccine Forum in Munich and the World Vaccine Congress in Singapore.
- Setting up a facility in the Biopolis, Helios. It has over 4,300 sft of laboratory and office space.
- Forging partnerships with Crucell to licence its PER.C6 technology used in the JE vaccine development and OctoPlus to co-develop a single-shot JE vaccine.

What is your product development and commercialization strategy?

SingVax currently has two products in development; a JE vaccine targeted at the endemic and travel markets and an EV71 vaccine, to fight Hand Foot and Mouth Disease (HFMD), which is targeted at children before they enter childcare centers. SingVax is actively looking at in-licensing, in order to build up the company's product pipeline. The company's commercialization strategy is to seek development partners for its products and its key development capabilities.

How do you intend to build upon your reach in the Asia Pacific region?

To think of "reach" in terms of sales and distribution within the Asia Pacific is a bit early, as we are still in the product development stage. However, SingVax is looking to do clinical development within Asia, and we are currently exploring different countries to run such studies. As mentioned earlier, we are also looking at in-licensing and partnerships, so potential partners from the Asia Pacific are welcome.

How much investment has gone into SingVax so far? Are you looking at scaling it up? How?

Till date, including equity investment and grant support, we have received over \$13 million. This has been funding the business. We obviously will need to continue to fund the business, in order to sustain our level of activities. So, we are considering a number of options, including Series B financing, M&A deals and new collaborations.

What kind of market response do you expect to be there for JE and EV71 vaccines?

The current JE vaccine market is estimated at \$250 million. SingVax's JE vaccine is based on the inactivated whole JE virus particles, and the company aims to develop a single-shot vaccine. As such, SingVax's vaccine will have numerous advantages in terms of safety and compliance. EV 71 is the main causative virus of HFMD. There is currently no HFMD vaccine available, and the market opportunity for an EV 71 vaccine is estimated at \$150 million. We target to have both our JE vaccine and EV71 vaccine within the clinic in 2008.

Nandita Singh