BioSpectrum
the business of Bio & Health Sciences
ASIA EDITION

Novartis Thailand is Leading the Way in Driving Greater Health Equity and Accessibility for All Patients in Thailand

March 8, 2025 | Opinion

Under the leadership of Country President Sumalee Kristarnin, Novartis Thailand is making commendable progress in fostering an inclusive workplace



In today’s corporate landscape, the empowerment of women and achieving equal access for all individuals, regardless of gender are critical topics. Yet, achieving true health equity remains a significant challenge. At Novartis Thailand, transforming this vision into reality goes beyond rhetoric; it's a commitment embodied through decisive actions. The company firmly believes that access to quality treatment is a fundamental human right, not a privilege.

Under the leadership of Country President Sumalee Kristarnin, Novartis Thailand is making commendable progress in fostering an inclusive workplace and driving sustainable healthcare initiatives. Sumalee’s transformative efforts emphasise community empowerment, innovation, and improved patient outcomes. The company's strong commitment to addressing gender disparities in healthcare through various campaigns, in alignment with the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs), has earned recognition, including the UN Women WEPs Award for Community Engagement & Partnerships 2024 and 2nd

runner-up for Leadership Commitment 2022.

Empowering Employees and Fostering Inclusion

Sumalee leads with a strong focus on internal sustainability, implementing progressive policies such as a 98-day paid parental leave, benefiting over 12% of employees, with the numbers expected to rise. By promoting work-life integration, Novartis Thailand nurtures a culture of productivity and well-being, allowing employees to thrive both personally and professionally.

Beyond employee policies, Sumalee envisions Novartis as a hub of creativity, collaboration, and scientific innovation. She cultivates an environment where employees are empowered to innovate, challenge norms, and drive meaningful change. Sumalee believes true success come from enabling employees to reach their full potential, recognizing that long-term business sustainability is deeply connected to employee development and societal impact.

Advancing Health Equity in Breast Cancer Care

Novartis Thailand's commitment to sustainability extends to equitable patient access to treatments and continuous medical innovation. In 2024, Novartis medicines reached 2.1 million Thai patients. Thai patients who took Novartis medicines gained a total of 20958 quality-adjusted life-years (QALYs).

Sumalee has led initiatives in collaboration with the broader healthcare stakeholders to enhance health literacy, with a particular focus on breast cancer—a leading cause of female mortality worldwide.

Breast cancer continues to be a leading cause of death among women globally, with about 21,000 new cases annually in Thailand. The incidence rate is 37.4 per 100,000 population, and the mortality rate is 11.8 per 100,000. Access to quality healthcare in remote areas poses significant challenges. Novartis Thailand and the Suandok Breast Cancer Network (SBCN) have formed a strategic alliance to improve breast cancer treatment. This initiative focuses on training medical professionals and strengthening multidisciplinary teams in Northern Thailand, ensuring specialists and Village Health Volunteers (VHVs) can extend care to remote communities.

Empowering Village Health Volunteers

VHVs are essential in bridging the gap between communities and healthcare facilities. As part of broader collaboration with multiple stakeholders, Novartis and SBCN have developed comprehensive training programs, equipping VHVs with critical breast cancer knowledge and patient referral skills. Using an organized online queue system, trained VHVs can expedite diagnoses and streamline treatment access, transforming them into vital health advocates.

Furthermore, an academic forum hosted by Novartis and SBCN brought together 78 participants, including VHVs and patient advocate leaders, fostering collaboration, knowledge-sharing and to improve patient outcomes.

Expanding the SBCN Model and Raising Public Awareness

The success of the Village Health Volunteers (VHVs) program has highlighted the importance of community-driven healthcare support. This has led to expansion beyond Northern Thailand to the Northeastern region. Novartis Thailand continues to play a supporting role by providing training sessions that incorporate disease knowledge, role-playing scenarios, and hands-on learning experiences. Additionally, Novartis has facilitated discussions with medical professionals from 13 hospitals in various regions in Thailand, aiming to replicate the SBCN model. These engagements mobilize multidisciplinary teams and accelerate care processes through regular breast cancer conferences, ensuring timely and effective treatment.

Collaborating for Patient-Centric Solutions

Novartis Thailand also understands the power of collaboration in achieving health equity. Through the Alliance & Partnerships for Patient Innovation & Solutions (APPIS) program, Novartis partners with patient organizations, oncologists, and key stakeholders to overcome access barriers and drive change. Over 90% of participants in these training sessions have reported that safe spaces for discussion enhance collective problem-solving.

In addition, Novartis Thailand has been dedicated to raising breast cancer awareness through impactful public outreach, partnering with the Thai Breast Cancer Community (TBCC). Educational webinars and social media campaigns highlight patient journeys from diagnosis to treatment and resilience, emphasizing the importance of proper care.

"The "Smile, Hope, Encouragement: The Next Move for the mBC Event" attracted over 300 participants, combining science and art to foster empathy and understanding of the patient journey. Activities like sewing artificial breast forms and painting headbands encouraged public involvement, boosting confidence and morale among recovering patients.

A Future Driven by Innovation and Accessibility

Integrating cutting-edge research and development into healthcare efforts, Novartis Thailand ensures scientific advancements translate into practical impact. By investing in advanced diagnostics, targeted therapies, and personalized medicine, Novartis aims to set new standards in treatments including in breast cancer, cardiovascular, immunology and rare diseases.

At the heart of these efforts lies Sumalee's commitment to patient-centric solutions. Sumalee challenges her team to think innovatively and proactively seek alternative models to broaden access to cutting-edge medicines for breast cancer patients and other key therapeutic areas in which they operate in Thailand. Her vision ensures no patient is left behind, regardless of geographic location or socioeconomic status.

Novartis Thailand is proud to drive transformative change, reimagining medicine to improve and extend lives. By breaking barriers, fostering collaborations, and championing health equity, the company strives to create a future where quality healthcare is accessible to all. Every patient deserves a chance at a healthier, brighter future, and Novartis Thailand remains steadfast in its dedication to making this vision a reality.