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Amgen CEO speaks of firm's grand entry into Japan

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The world's largest biotechnology company Amgen entered into a long-term collaboration with Astellas Pharma in May this year, and is set to form a joint venture in Tokyo, Amgen Astellas BioPharma KK , with the Japanese drug maker to co-develop and sell five drugs currently in Amgen's pipeline, in Japan. In February, Amgen management had called its lack of presence in Japan and China 'a noticeable gap.' Now that Amgen has initiated the move into Japan, its chairman and chief executive officer Mr Robert A Bradway speaks to *BioSpectrum* about Amgen's expectations from the partnership, its focus areas, and the possible impact of the joint venture on Japanese pharmaceutical industry.

What are Amgen's expectations from the joint venture with Astellas Pharma in Japan?

This alliance leverages the complementary capabilities of both companies - Amgen's five pipeline candidates spanning a range of disease states including cardiovascular and bone diseases and cancer, along with Astellas' deep knowledge of the Japanese patient and physician needs, long-term commercial and regulatory experience and strong presence as a leading company in Japan. This alliance with Astellas will enable Amgen to build very rapidly on-the-ground capabilities in Japan with the goal of creating a stand-alone Amgen business as soon as 2020.

Besides Amgen's focus on co-development and co-commercialization of five Amgen pipeline medicines in Japan, what are the other targets set to be achieved before Amgen takes complete ownership of Amgen Astellas BioPharma KK?

In addition to co-developing and co-commercializing these pipeline medicines for patients in Japan, we will be working with Astellas to operationalize the joint venture in order to ensure it becomes a successful business entity. The joint venture will be based in Tokyo and will be initially staffed by transferred employees from Amgen Development KK, seconded employees from Astellas, and newly hired employees. This alliance will help Amgen increase its Japan capability, accelerate and maximize the value of its clinical pipeline, provide a platform for future product launches in Japan, and deliver on its global expansion strategy.

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What does the Amgen Astellas alliance mean to Japan's pharmaceutical market?

This alliance will help accelerate development and commercialization of Amgen medicines for patients in Japan. The therapeutic areas - cardiovascular and bone diseases and cancer - of the alliance products are well aligned with unmet medical needs in Japan and these products have the potential to deliver transformational impact in helping patients. We anticipate the first commercial launch will be as early as three years from now (2016).

What level of competition is Amgen expecting to face in Japan?

We anticipate the competition and market in Japan will be similar to other markets. We are focused on bringing to market important medicines that help address unmet medical needs in Japan.

What are the other big plans that Amgen has for Japan's pharma market?

Japan is an important market, and this alliance reflects Amgen's long-term commitment to Japan. The Japanese public has unique therapeutic needs with life expectancies and a senior population segment that rank among the world's highest. Additionally, Japan has historically rewarded a high-level of R&D innovation. This alliance will be key to our ability to address unmet medical needs in Japan by combining the best of Amgen's global expertise with Astellas' understanding of the market.