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Global luminaries address Trade-Tariff concerns, healthcare expenditure and innovation objectives at BIO Asia-Taiwan 2025

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Media Roundtable: Strategies to navigate high tariff policies in pharma value chain



(Left to Right) Wallace Lin; Claire Skentelbery; George Hara; Johnsee Lee; Liu Lee-Cheng; Dr. Kelly Seagraves

The **BIO Asia-Taiwan 2025** convention and exhibition kicked off on **July 23 at the Taipei Nangang Exhibition Center, TaiNEX 1 and 2,** bringing together over 2,300 attendees from more than 50 countries across a week-long event till 27th July. With a dynamic theme, "**Next Wave of Biotech Opportunities**," the event served as a vibrant hub for leaders spanning academia, industry, entrepreneurs, innovators and capital investors exploring groundbreaking advancements and opportunities in the bioscience arena. Co-hosted by Taiwan Bio Industry Organization (Taiwan BIO), the convention highlighted Taiwan's pivotal role in fostering international collaboration, driving innovation, and shaping the future of the global life sciences sector.

A media roundtable discussion was held following the inauguration graced by the senior delegates;

- **Johnsee Lee, *Chairman of BIO Asia–Taiwan***
- **Liu Lee-Cheng, *Chairman of Taiwan Bio Industry Association (Taiwan BIO)***
- ***Wallace Lin, Secretary General. Taiwan Bio Industry Organisation, Vice Chiar, International Council of Biotech Associations (ICBA)***
- **George Hara, *2024 BIO Asia Award Recipient***
- **Dr. Kelly Seagraves, *Vice President for National Security and International Affairs at the Biotechnology Innovation Organization (BIO) in Washington, DC***
- **Claire Skentelbery, *Chair, International council of Biotechnology Association (ICBA), Director General Europabio***

The opening ceremony of BIO Asia-Taiwan 2025 set the stage for critical discussions on biotechnology, global collaboration, and public interest capitalism. The delegates on the panel exchanged insights and outlined strategies for **navigating through**

current tariff turmoil and economic uncertainties to address the challenges posed by new tariff regimes. The experts emphasized the necessity and urgency of bilateral dialogue, policy transparency, trade cooperation and public awareness in order to balance cross-border trade prospects to alleviate economic uncertainties.

George Hara acknowledged the challenges involved in achieving a mutual advantage, but he asserted that continuing dialogue and coordinated efforts remain essential.

Dr. Kelly Seagraves, *Vice President for National Security and International Affairs at the Biotechnology Innovation Organization (BIO) in Washington, DC*, highlighted the US perspective on regional trade agreements and their implications for the biotechnology industry. As a biotechnology trade association, BIO educates policymakers about the complex ecosystem of biotechnology, including global supply chains.

BIO is concerned about tariffs' impact on the biotechnology industry, as they can cause significant disruptions. The organization works to minimize the negative effects of such policies while advocating for measures that promote and enhance the growth of the biotechnology industry. To achieve this, BIO collaborates with partners like China Biopharmaceutical Association (CBA) to craft effective measures and enhance policymakers' understanding of the industry's needs. BIO is actively engaging with the U.S. Federal authorities. Furthermore, Dr. Kelly emphasized that patience is essential during the transition of power in order to rebuild long-term dialogue and relationships.

Lee Cheng-Liu, *Chairman, Taiwan Bio Industry Organisation (BIO)* pointed out that "Connections with international organizations and global players are critical for fostering internal development and broadening perspectives on global change. Support systems, beyond just industry, are essential in the biotechnology sector."

Claire Skentelbery, *Chair, ICBA* commented, "Europe BIO's mission is to create the right legislative environment for biotechnology's successful growth, ensuring that products reach markets and patients. Participating in BIO Taiwan Asia is an honor, as it brings together scientists, investors, manufacturers, and governments, which is vital in such a competitive, risky, and time-consuming field. Scientific discovery requires collaboration among actors with diverse skill sets to deliver its benefits. Global events like these are essential for fostering partnerships that enable biotechnology to deliver its advantages."

Claire Skentelbery pointed out that for the biotech industry, which requires long-term investment, policy uncertainty poses a greater risk than tariffs. Such uncertainty hinders companies from making long-term decisions. She emphasized that only stable and trusted international collaborations can mitigate risk and ensure the industry's long-term development.

Continuing her discussion of healthcare expenditures and affordability of precision therapies, Claire Skentelbery discussed the high cost of cell and gene therapies, sometimes called "synergistic therapies," as well as the impact these therapies have on existing healthcare facilities and budgets.

"Unlike traditional treatments that incur annual costs, these therapies are typically one-time interventions, which current healthcare budgets are not designed to accommodate. This creates a significant challenge in funding and delivering these advanced treatments effectively. To address the high cost of cell and gene therapies, several strategies have been proposed. These include redesigning healthcare budgets to support long-term investments in healthier patients, increasing access to these therapies for more individuals, and expanding their availability across countries with more progressive regulatory systems. Additionally, improving the use of shared data can help reduce costs and accelerate the time to market for these treatments, making it more affordable for companies to bring products to patients. Achieving these goals requires global collaboration among companies, policymakers, insurance providers, and the broader business community to implement effective solutions." opines Claire Skentelbery.

***Johnsee Lee**, Chairman, Taiwan Bio Industry Organisation (BIO)* iterated "Tariffs and trade deficits are driving the need for greater regional and international collaboration, particularly in the biotechnology sector. Additionally, there is a growing emphasis on fostering digital collaboration to further strengthen these partnerships. A stronger focus on digital collaboration is essential in order to balance the impact of tariffs and enhance regional cooperation" explained.

In her remarks, Dr. Kelly Seagrave, highlighted the organization's role in advocating for the biotechnology industry, particularly in matters associated with tariffs.
"BIO focuses on educating and engaging with the US government to help policymakers understand the complexities of biotechnology, its ecosystem, and the structure of the industry. One of the challenges BIO faces is explaining the intricate nature of global supply chains, which are not always apparent to policymakers, making it difficult to succinctly convey the potential impact of tariffs, whether general or specific to pharmaceuticals. BIO's goal is to guide policy in a way that avoids adverse impacts and promotes the growth, amplification, and acceleration of the biotechnology industry. To achieve this, BIO collaborates with partners like the ICBA to craft effective messages and support educational efforts." stated Dr. Kelly.

Claire Skentelbery addressed the significant impact of tariffs and, more importantly, the prevailing lack of certainty in the complex pharmaceutical sector. She pointed out that "The primary challenge for the heavily regulated pharmaceutical industry is not necessarily tariffs themselves, but the damaging lack of long-term certainty that prevents prudent business decisions and necessitates a strategic shift towards stable global partnerships. The assumption that tariffs will remain constant is flawed; their future is uncertain".

"The pharmaceutical industry is inherently complex, slow to adapt, and demands substantial long-term investment. The lack of certainty about the long-term business landscape is more detrimental than tariffs themselves, as it paralyzes business decision-making. This uncertainty leads to the rerouting of partnerships and supply chains to different regions" addsClaire Skentelbery.

Claire Skentelbery advocates for communication and the establishment of stable, transparent, predictable, and trust-based long-term partnerships across continents and regions. "While facing significant challenges from the world's largest pharmaceutical market, this situation also presents an opportunity to strengthen relationships globally and catalyze new, long-term partnership routes. Due to heavy regulations, building a new pharmaceutical production pipeline can take up to 10 years. Consequently, the industry cannot respond to sudden or fluctuating tariffs overnight," explains Ms.Skentelbery.

Furthering the discussion, Dr. Kelly Seagrave opined that "the new Trump administration has been in office for over five months, marking a period of transition and relationship-building. While this process is still a work in progress, there is a positive trajectory in the administration's willingness to listen to industry perspectives. Establishing and maintaining linkages through repeated conversations is essential for updating the administration on new policies and their impacts. The discussions around tariffs have evolved over time, driven by conversations between the U.S. government and other countries, as well as with industries directly affected by potential tariff policies. As the administration becomes more established, deeper channels for dialogue are expected, fostering more effective communication in the future."

‘The Bio International Convention experienced good attendance, notably from government officials. This is viewed as a positive development, leading to high-level officials meeting with BIO's company members. This engagement is expected to continue” explained Dr. Kelly.

Joshua Lee highlighted the global situation of **biosimilar and generic drugs**, drawing comparisons between Taiwan's current usage and the experiences in Europe and the United States. The discussion underscored the challenge of balancing innovation with affordability and accessibility.

Joshua Lee noted that Taiwan currently has a very low percentage of biosimilar and generic drug usage. Efforts are underway to increase this level, addressing the need to balance innovation with affordability and accessibility.

Adding to this, Claire Skentelbery stated, "Europe recognizes the critical need to balance innovative medicines, which have protection periods, with generic and biosimilar medicines, which become available after these protections expire. When Europe introduced its general pharmaceutical legislation, it reduced protections for innovative medicines, leading to significant pushback because innovative medicines are the foundation for all future generics and biosimilars. There is an ongoing education process focused on how to balance the protection necessary for innovation with the reduced cost and increased accessibility that comes from generic production. However, Europe has not yet found the 'right balance' between these competing priorities, and it remains an ongoing discussion."

Biotechnology and generic medicines represent two distinct yet vital sectors, with the innovative biotechnology sector driving the development of new and advanced treatments. Organizations like BIO play a crucial role in advocating for and supporting this sector.

Building on this, Claire Skentelbery stated, "The generic medicines sector is vital for ensuring the availability of medicines, yet it operates under significant financial constraints and risks. Generics face very narrow profit margins, making them highly cost-sensitive, where any change in cost can threaten the supply. The sector has already achieved peak efficiency, yet it remains vulnerable to geopolitical stresses that complicate operations. Despite representing innovative bio industries, the critical role of generics in ensuring mixed availability of medicines is widely acknowledged."

Liu Lee-Cheng, Chairman of Taiwan Bio Industry Association (Taiwan BIO) explained that "The usage, value, and**regulatory landscapes surrounding generic and biosimilar drugs** vary across international contexts. Generic drugs represent approximately 80% of items but only 20-30% of the total value, while biosimilar drugs currently account for less than 30% of the total value. The policy landscape for both is evolving. In Japan, regulations require the use of generics or biosimilars once patents expire, with clinics and hospitals assigned specific quotas for adoption. The target for generic drug use after patent expiry is around 80%, with biosimilars having a slightly lower adoption target. Europe, on the other hand, is identified as

having the most significant use of biosimilars and is also a major producer and supplier of biosimilars globally. Despite being alternatives to innovative drugs, biosimilars still require clinical studies, and their pricing structure differs from that of originator drugs."

Furthur, Claire Skentelbery, ponted that biotechnology associations play a critical role in **countering misinformation and fostering a broader understanding of biotechnology**'s importance by engaging the public and various societal sectors.

"Key challenges and responsibilities for biotechnology associations include combating misinformation, particularly concerning vaccines, which negatively impacts public health, as evidenced by changing measles outbreaks globally. Biotechnology associations face the important responsibility of engaging with diverse segments of society to promote understanding and act as a bridge for citizen-led awareness. It is crucial for these associations to expand their outreach beyond internal discussions, where participants may already share similar perspectives, and actively step beyond their traditional roles to effectively connect with broader audiences" added Claire Skentelbery.

In conclusion, Claire Skentelbery underscored the critical responsibility of biotechnology associations in educating the public and combating misinformation to ensure a broader understanding and acceptance of biotechnology's role in society. For instance, public misinformation regarding vaccines directly impacts adoption.

"Biotechnology associations must also be conduits for grassroots public awareness. Associations must actively serve as a vital link to foster a citizen-led understanding of biotechnology. National associations must venture outside their established comfort zones to engage with diverse audiences. Engaging with stakeholders through sector-specific platforms is crucial. In addition, information must be presented in the language and context relevant to each sector to enhance understanding and engagement." added Skentelbery.

Coverage by Hithaishi Bhaskar