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APECâ??s Opportunity to Lead: Transforming Lung Cancer Outcomes Across Asia Pacific

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Matthias Skillecorn, Vice President, Asia Pacific Strategy Organisation at Johnson & Johnson, highlights the need for earlier diagnosis, biomarker testing, treatment access and regional collaboration to improve lung cancer outcomes across Asia Pacific.



As Asia Pacific economies grapple with ageing populations, shrinking workforces and rising healthcare expenditure, they are also at the center of the global fight against lung cancer. The region represents 60% of global lung cancer cases and deaths, with around 1.5 million people diagnosed across the region each year.

Lung cancer is more than a public health challenge – it is increasingly an economic and societal issue, as it can drive productivity losses, direct health system costs and the often-invisible knock on impact on caregivers and families.

A major opportunity to tilt the balance in this fight is the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), a key intergovernmental forum in the region, which is working to strengthen regional policy collaboration to drive improved outcomes for patients with lung cancer. By driving action that improves diagnosis and access to treatments in the region,

the impact on patients' lives can be considerable.

The unique APAC challenge: Beyond the smoker's disease

Asia Pacific's lung cancer crisis cannot be understood – or addressed – solely through the lens of smoking.

A significant proportion of people diagnosed with lung cancer in Asia have never smoked, yet the persistent misconception that it is a "smoker's disease" continues to fuel stigma, influence policy priorities and affect patients' experiences.

Lung cancer can also be driven by environmental exposures and genetic factors. For example, epidermal growth factor receptor (EGFR) mutations, which can cause the cells to grow uncontrollably, are more common in Asia Pacific than in other parts of the world.

Low awareness of contributing factors, together with the mental and emotional strain of diagnosis, can make it harder for patients to navigate their treatment options.

Early diagnosis and biomarker testing

The point of diagnosis is an important stage in lung cancer, and two things matter – time and precision.

Early diagnosis can dramatically improve treatment outcomes: for example, of those lung cancer patients diagnosed at stage I, 61% will live for five years or more, compared with just 7% at later stages.

Catching the disease that early is rare, but screening can improve outcomes significantly.

Just as important for patients is access to the right testing and clinical information to guide them to the right treatment regimen and care. This means access to biomarker testing.

Broader patient access to innovative solutions

Another key factor is broader access to innovative solutions, including surgery and the precision medicines that treat the specific biology of the tumor to drive better outcomes.

In efforts to improve survival, combining therapies for better outcomes has become more common for lung cancer.

However, there are challenges in recognising appropriate value of the innovation in many healthcare systems, decisions can be delayed and access can be limited.

Although these clinical regimens can improve survival and help address treatment resistance, they can only do so if patients can access appropriate testing, treatment options and care pathways without unnecessary delay or limitation.

This means having the right systems, policies and care around them.

Addressing barriers and fostering collaboration

Making this a reality requires policymakers to recognise lung cancer as a major regional health, economic and social priority, and take the right action to improve prevention, awareness and early diagnosis of the biology of the tumor, access to treatments and care.

But no single organisation, sector or policy intervention can address the scale of the challenge alone.

Progress depends on bringing together policymakers, healthcare leaders, patient communities and innovators to ensure that advances in science are translated into practical solutions and outcomes for patients.

In this spirit, Johnson & Johnson is proud to work with partners across the region to support the conditions needed to unlock the value of innovation and deliver the best possible outcomes for patients across Asia Pacific — from stronger evidence-based policy to more consistent access to diagnosis, treatment and care.

This collaboration is where APEC can lead.

By creating a clear roadmap for evidence-based policymaking, practical collaboration and best-practice sharing, APEC has the potential to create the backbone to underpin efforts to improve lung cancer outcomes across Asia Pacific.

The opportunity is clear: Asia Pacific can move from recognising the burden of lung cancer to leading a more coordinated response and ultimately better meeting the needs of patients.

With urgency, collaboration and innovation, APEC can help shape a future where more people are diagnosed earlier, treated effectively and able to live their lives to the fullest.