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Women Achievers Spl: Ms Siew Hwa ONG: Improving biomedical and bioscience environment in Singapore

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Dr Siew Hwa ONG knows a lot about growth. After stints as Post-doctoral Fellow at Mt Sinai Hospital, Canada and Assistant Professor at Institute of Molecular and cell, A*STAR, Dr Siew joined National University of Singapore in 2004. She was appointed the Chairman of BioSingapore in 2015, where she successfully continues to handle activities and initiatives tailored to improve the national biomedical and bioscience environment in order to solve challenges and capture opportunities.

An avid reader, Dr Siew Hwa ONG firmly believes in the importance of hard work in building any successful career. A professional, educationist and an expert in her field, she has trained and worked in Singapore, US, Canada, including in public research institutes, academia, hospitals, big pharma and start-up environment. Dr Siew Hwa Ong is presently the Director and Chief Scientist at Acumen Research Laboratories.

Founded in 2010, Acumen Research Laboratories (ARL) is a contract research organization (CRO) that provides a comprehensive range of customized, high-quality contract R&D services in drug target discovery and pre-clinical drug development to support the pharmaceutical industry and related biomedical sciences research communities world-wide.

“I worked for many years as a scientist in the academia and industry before starting my own company.” Shuffling between her busy work schedule while balancing her personal priorities and family commitments, she really values the freedom that she

has been able to achieve by starting her own company. She adds, “I would say I’m indeed in the situation I expected, not an easy journey but the freedom I needed to do my work is very important – the peace between my heart & my mind.”

Based in Singapore, Acumen Research Laboratories developed a new molecular diagnostic test for sepsis, including a novel sepsis host response test. Recently, they licensed this technology to a German company to commercialize in the US and Europe, and are now planning to enter the Chinese market as well.

While talking about her share of challenges and male disparity in the industry, Dr Siew said, “It is true that the industry remains very male-dominated. However, I would say each gender has his and her own intrinsic sets of strengths and weaknesses, can be genetically or socially linked. The two genders will always be different.” She feels that these differences per se are very valuable contributions to the diversity and complementarity of ideas, methods of solving problems etc. “The challenges occur in situations when the inability to reach a mutually acceptable way to proceed on certain important issues and sometimes these can lead to loss of good opportunities that can be captured together.” She also believes that career choices and plans are very individual and multi-factorial and the reasons for each action or decision are due to more than whether the person is male or female.

Her secret mantra to success is a famous quote in Chinese, *Ã¥Â¿Æ?Ã¥Å?Â¨Ã¥â??ÂªÃ©â?¡Å?Ã¯Â¼Å?Ã¦â?Â¶Ã¨Å½Â·Ã¥Â°Â±Ã¥Å?Â¨Ã¥â??ÂªÃ©â?¡Å?.* She translates it for us. *“Translated literally means where your heart is, where the harvests will be. This means what you focus on and where you put in efforts, that’s where you will reap returns.”*

Dr Siew Hwa ONG advices budding entrepreneurs to remain focused and patient in the pursuit of commercializing their business ideas.