COLUMBIA ASIA HOSPITAL CELEBRATES ITS 20th Anniversary

The advancement of a distinct multi-disciplinary specialty private hospital group whose presence today spans across South Asia and Southeast Asia with two decades of quality patient care.

Columbia Asia Group of Hospitals presence in Malaysia now spans 20 years. From their humble beginnings, today Columbia Asia has 28 multi-disciplinary specialty hospitals in operation which covers four major countries in South Asia and Southeast Asia. This modern private healthcare group is soon to grow even bigger and further expand their presence across the rest of Asia with six more facilities currently at different
Columbia Asia now owns and manages 11 private multi-disciplinary specialty hospitals throughout Malaysia, three in Indonesia, three in Vietnam and 11 in India.

Columbia Asia hospitals are located in residential areas and widely respected for bringing affordable and quality healthcare to the communities. These modern healthcare facilities are modelled and equipped with new medical technologies in an environment that can offer excellent healthcare to the families and corporations. Columbia Asia has made significant strides in ambulatory care and less invasive treatments, shortening the length of stay for the patients.

The biggest advances in healthcare are about small yet significant, evidence-based strides,

“Today Columbia Asia have cared for over 12 million outpatients and approximately 3 million inpatients in Malaysia alone.”
when consistently carried out delivers positive patient outcomes.

Community initiatives like screenings, public talks with corporate, primary caregivers and with dedicated community partners are initiatives that will promote preventive medicine and education. It is about engagement with the people the hospital serves and its commitment towards delivering the best patient care possible and together support the efforts better to manage the health and wellness of the community as a whole.

Improve patient safety such as reducing hospital-acquired infections, readmissions, and reducing the average length of stay (ALOS), positively affects patient outcomes and these are primarily some of the many critical KPIs that effectively measure the quality indicators and help determine the quality of the healthcare provided. The Columbia Asia Hospitals have been able to maintain their ALOS at approximately 2 days.

Among the many attributes, one of the primary success factors of the Columbia Asia Hospital model is the comprehensiveness of their medical programme which includes Radiology, Anesthesiology, Internal Medicine, Paediatrics, Obstetrics and Gynaecology, General Surgery, Orthopaedics, ENT, Ophthalmology, Urology and Dermatology. These core disciplines effectively meet the majority of the healthcare needs of the community.

Apart from these core medical services, Columbia Asia has available other sub-specialised services such as respiratory medicine, cardiology, rheumatology, colorectal surgery, breast and endocrine surgery, sports medicine, hand and microsurgery and many more, situated in various locations across Columbia Asia group of hospitals.

Medical governance remains
an important pillar in ensuring a healthcare facility remains focused on providing the best patient care possible. Every Columbia Asia Hospital has a Medical Advisory Committee (MAC) which consists of the heads of department of each medical and surgical discipline and is chaired by the Chief of Medical Services based in each Columbia Asia Hospital.

Above this medical governing structure at the facility, Columbia Asia prides itself in having established a Medical Advisory Board (MAB) which is made up of all the Chief of Medical Services from all Columbia Asia group of hospitals. The Medical Advisory Board is chaired by the company’s Group Medical Director.

The three primary roles and focus of the MAB is to continually raise the standard and quality of patient care; conduct stringent credentialing and clinical privileging of consultants, and uphold uncompromising commitment towards the ethics and conduct of practitioners of patient care.

Over the years, these values have remained the pillars of Columbia Asia’s medical program. The success of this private healthcare model which today is being replicated across the region to help meet the ever growing demand for effective and efficient healthcare. Columbia Asia is today in the forefront of being the preferred healthcare provider for families, corporates, 3rd party administrators and insurance.

The healthcare scene is changing from provider-driven to patient-centred, where healthcare consumers are increasingly taking charge of their healthcare. Hospitals are also moving from receiving patients to reaching out and supporting the healthcare needs of the community or population-based healthcare.
AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH THE CEO OF COLUMBIA ASIA - SOUTHEAST ASIA

It was an opportune moment to catch up with Mr. Kelvin Tan, the CEO – Southeast Asia, Columbia Asia on their 20th anniversary this year to relive the many milestones Columbia Asia had overcome to get to be where they are today and what the future holds for Columbia Asia Hospitals and their valued customers.

infoMed: This is Columbia Asia Hospitals 20th anniversary, what is your most important message to the healthcare consumers after successfully providing services here in Malaysia for 20 years?

KT: We have evolved through the many challenges we faced over the past years to be better and more resilient in our commitment to be the preferred private healthcare choice for families, corporates, 3rd party administrators and insurance companies. We remain determined in our resolve to provide the best patient outcome possible, and we want the community we serve to know that we are here to stay and to build better and more efficient hospitals to meet their needs.

InfoMed: How has been the growth path for Columbia Asia since its inception 20 years ago?
KT: From our humble beginning of three facilities in Malaysia in the 1990’s, today we have 11 facilities in Malaysia and 28 across the region. We believe we have a private healthcare model that is efficient and effective, which is sustainable even during difficult and challenging times. We are gaining significant endorsement from corporates, 3rd party administrators and insurance companies, as they have come to believe in our healthcare model as one that delivers effective and efficient patient care. Over the years, we have cared for over 12 million outpatients and approximately 3 million inpatients in Malaysia alone. This we view as a positive endorsement and trust from the patients we serve, and we will
continue to cherish and build on that trust.

**InfoMed:** Your expansion plan and the new hospitals you’re planning?

**KT:** Apart from the 28 hospitals in operation, we have six more which are currently at different stages of development, and three of which are located in Malaysia. These three will be located in Klang, Johore Bahru and Penang. We are continuously looking for new development sites across Asia and even Africa, as we believe the Columbia Asia Hospital model is the private healthcare model that effectively meets the needs of our patients today.

**InfoMed:** How would you continue to improve your services keeping efficiency and costs sensitivity as a priority?

**KT:** Our efficiency is derived through our model, as our system and processes effectively deliver good patient outcomes at an affordable cost. The Columbia Asia model omits excesses and minimises inefficient workflows that translate to inefficient staffing cost which comes primarily from excessively large facilities and cumbersome structures and unnecessary equipment outlay. We believe cost in itself is not a key priority. Cost should be an outcome of the way we deliver effective, efficient and quality patient care.

**InfoMed:** These days healthcare is increasingly being seen as a business. There is a growing gap between the reality of medicine and the perception by the public. What’s your view and how does Columbia Asia continues to circumvent such public opinion?

**KT:** Don’t think Columbia Asia by ourselves can circumvent such public opinion. We just need to remain focused in what we believe we can do best and let the public judge our deliverables. At our end, we need to look at healthcare as a noble profession that demands our compassion, commitment and integrity.

**InfoMed:** We understand that Columbia Asia is involved in CSR program such as National Blind Football Team, Cleft Lip and Palate Project, Scoliosis and Diabetes Awareness Project. Can you elaborate on these good works?

**KT:** We do what we can as opportunities are presented to us to be of service. If we feel it’s an appropriate CSR, we will try to mobilise our available resources to assist and hope to be able to collaborate with other CSR conscious companies to bring some cheer and hope to the less fortunate. We believe it’s the right thing to do, to give back to the society we serve.

**InfoMed:** As we are looking at newly developing demographics with increasing cost and an ageing population, how is Columbia Asia positioning itself to play its role in further enhancing the delivery of healthcare for Malaysians?

**KT:** We will continue to learn and evolve to ensure the Columbia Asia healthcare model is sensitive to the changing demographics and remain relevant to the healthcare community. There will always be inflationary pressures, but we believe we are better poised to manage these pressures as we are committed to staying away from unnecessary excesses, whilst offering our patients the best patient care possible.

**InfoMed:** In Malaysia, more than 50% of the patients getting care in private hospitals are insured. How is this working relationship with insurers and professionals in a transparent manner accomplished?

**KT:** We maintain a very open and transparent communication with insurers, and we believe we are on the same page in terms of wanting what is best for their policyholders and our
patients. We need to appreciate that it has to be a 'win-win' proposition and that we are here for the long term. We must never compromise our trust in each other.

**InfoMed:** How do you work with the insurers and TPAs (Third Party Administrators) to ensure delivery of efficient and affordable/appropriate care?

**KT:** Our medical and clinical governance together with well-informed healthcare providers deliver the efficient and affordable/appropriate care. The insurers and TPAs understand the norm of practice and appreciate the quality of our patient outcomes with the relatively shorter length of stay (averaging at 2.1 days) and affordable case rates.

**InfoMed:** What are the programs and initiatives that Columbia Asia Hospitals offer to group insurance partners to enhance preventive healthcare that seeks to reduce medical costs and staff downtime due to illness?

**KT:** We do offer Continuous Medical Education (CME), health talks and public forums to help disseminate good preventive healthcare information to employees of corporates who request for such services either directly or through their insurance partners. Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are a growing concern in this fast paced, modern lifestyle. Both public and private enterprises have much to do to help manage these debilitating disease conditions. Columbia Asia aims to play its part in contributing towards a healthier society.

**InfoMed:** Serving informed customers has its benefits and challenges, what’s your view?

**KT:** As access to information in this digital age is borderless, we believe it is necessary that we embrace the reality of the times. In fact, we believe it pushes all caregivers to stay informed and be at the forefront of the latest information available and to remain relevant to the patient we serve.

**InfoMed:** How do you ensure your caregivers practice good communication with their patients?

**KT:** We keep them abreast with the relevant information available to us and communicate what is necessary for them to appreciate the bigger picture and to relate better to perspectives other than just their own. It’s an ongoing learning process. Good effective communication is partially common sense and partially cultural and partially our upbringing. There must surely be many ways to communicate better without being abrasive and hurtful. We all need to make the choice to help someone else have a good day.

**InfoMed:** What are the greatest challenges for Columbia Asia the next five years?

**KT:** As Columbia Asia continues to build a sustainable organisation with strong values and work culture, the competition will try to shortcut their journey by seeking out our valued employees. We need to keep our employees engaged and to believe we can make a difference in their career and their lives through healthy work-life balance and positive values.

Believe we need to be open to evaluating new technologies but be cautious about the cost and benefit of new changes as not all new models or next generation equipment are necessarily value-add. ‘Technology creep’ will escalate cost and sometimes with very little benefit to the patient.

We must remain focused in our direction and proposition. We must realise we can’t be all things to all people. Be clear about our niche and be the best at it.

**InfoMed:** Your new vision and mission for Columbia Asia in the next ten years?

**KT:** Our new vision and mission for Columbia Asia is a statement of who we are, what we have been doing, why we do what we do, and how we can best remain relevant in the life of the community we serve. We must be deemed as an organisation that has the passion for making people better.