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Where Innovation Accelerates

INTERVIEW

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Technology as a Tool for Drug Discovery Innovation

Interview with Dr. Oliver Nayler, Head of Cardiovascular & Fibrosis Biology, Actelion Pharmaceutical Ltd.

Actelion Pharmaceutical Ltd. is the leading biopharmaceutical company in Switzerland focused on the discovery, development and commercialization of innovative drugs. The company's outstanding know-how has made it a world leader in the science and medicine of pulmonary arterial hypertension (PAH). Actelion focuses on specific families of molecular targets, such as GPCR (G-Protein Coupled Receptors). PARK INNOVAARE's series of workshops INNOVATION in PRACTICE recently featured Actelion's Head of Cardiovascular & Fibrosis Biology Dr. Oliver Nayler, who has worked at the company for over 17 years; he presented Actelion's experience with product and technology innovation.

How do you organize the drug discovery and development process at Actelion? Where does it differ from others'?

Dr. Oliver Nayler: We live a philosophy of innovation, of thinking outside the box, and we are striving to achieve the extraordinary. Consequently, we always ask ourselves how things can be done better, more quickly and more efficiently. Innovation at Actelion is something everybody can and should participate in. It's about people and how they engage.

What technologies are of a key importance for your innovations?

Throughout the whole drug discovery and development process, from the initial idea to the final product, the company must be innovative and find solutions to problems. Technologies help us find those solutions. It can be a 3D print, software or a new process for formulating a compound. Some technologies, like a new state-of-the-art microscope, help the company in its creative process because they open doors and inspire. Other technologies, like robotics, are necessary for getting the job done more quickly, precisely and efficiently.

How do you integrate partners such as other companies, start-ups or research institutes in your product development process?

Actelion continuously collaborates with external specialists, suppliers, start-ups and academic researchers. This helps the company push limits and speed up the solution finding processes.

What is most important in product innovation for a pharmaceutical company today?

The current innovation that will have a significant impact on drug discovery and development is the Crispr/CAS technology (a genome editing technique). It is a simple, precise method of genetic engineering that provides pharmaceutical companies with a number of opportunities.

Do you measure your innovation impact? If so, how?

The impact of our innovation capabilities is reflected in our pipeline. Our most important indicators are our innovative products that are helping people suffering from disease.

PARK INNOVARE at the Paul Scherrer Institute PSI is one location of "Switzerland Innovation". PARK INNOVAARE's main focus is on innovations in the fields of accelerator technology, advanced materials & processes, humans & health, and energy. In order to deliver the best services for industrial research groups and spin-offs, we connect creative minds in large corporations, SME and research institutions, both domestic and international. Our mission: connect the right people to enable innovations to be made market-ready faster.

