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Institut Pasteur Korea CEO Talks COVID-19 Crisis, Drug And Vaccine Development

BIO-Europe Fireside Chat

by Jung Won Shin

In this video fireside chat from the recent BIO-Europe Digital 2021 conference, the CEO of Institut Pasteur Korea outlines the research institute's role in managing the COVID-19 situation in the country, progress with the COVID-19 pipeline, issues related to the development of drugs and vaccines for the pandemic in South Korea, and her goals for the institute over the next few years.

Since she became CEO of Institut Pasteur Korea (IPK) in January, Youngmee Jee, a world-renowned expert in infectious disease research, has been leading the research institute's efforts help manage the global COVID-19 crisis through the discovery of repositioned therapeutic drug candidates.

In a video fireside chat at EBD Group's recent BIO-Europe Digital Meeting 2021, the CEO talked to *Scrip*'s Seoul-based senior reporter Jung Won Shin about how the COVID-19 programs are progressing, upcoming milestones, the Korean government's support to the private sector for coronavirus therapeutics and vaccines, and other related issues, along with her goals for IPK in the coming years.

Using its platform screening technology for SARS-CoV-2, IPK has already been able to identify four existing drug candidates with potential – nafamostat, camostat, ciclesonide and niclosamide - that are now undergoing or have partially completed clinical trials in Korea and other countries including Senegal, Mexico, Russia, Australia and India, the CEO said. Jee's hope is for favorable results enabling authorization for COVID-19 patients both locally and globally.

IPK is also working to discover new broad-spectrum antivirals for human coronaviruses by

screening a diverse set of libraries, and is collaborating with major hospitals to analyze immunological profiles of serum samples from vaccinated individuals. “This will provide important clues for characteristics of immunological responses and duration of protection for different vaccines and possibly data needed for booster shots,” Jee said.

Despite the Korean government’s continued support for the development of effective and safe vaccines and therapeutic development by domestic firms, most developers are finding the high cost of Phase III trials a real barrier for further progress. The government therefore needs to consider a further increase in funding for such late-stage studies and also to monitor trials at the national level, at least for the government-funded candidates, she added.

One necessary step would be to form data and safety monitoring boards to enable the sharing of technical findings among experts, Jee suggested.

Looking ahead, the CEO hopes that IPK’s research outcomes can ultimately be used for public health, that it will become a prominent global partner for infectious disease research, especially in therapeutics, and that the institute will serve as a research leader and hub for Institut Pasteur’s development in the Asia Pacific region.

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12:45 Strengths and weaknesses of Korean industry in original R&D, internationalization

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