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17 Oct 2023 | **News**

Japan's Biopharma Excellence Celebrated At 2nd Awards

Citeline Event In Tokyo

by Ian Haydock

Excellence, innovation, deal-making and personal achievement across the Japanese biopharma sector were celebrated at the Citeline Pharma Intelligence Awards Japan 2023, held in Tokyo on 17 October.

Citeline was delighted to be able to recognize and celebrate excellence across the Japanese pharma, biotech and clinical research industries at the 2nd Citeline Pharma Intelligence Awards Japan, held at the Palace Hotel in Tokyo on 17 October.

As the world continues to move into the post-COVID era, the pharma industry may be facing changes from the waning demand - and revenues - for pandemic-related drugs and vaccines. But it is also continuing to learn from, and in some cases adopt more permanently, new approaches and lessons learned.

Redistribution of supply chains, remote working and tools for conducting decentralized clinical trials are just some of the areas where COVID-19 resulted in significant changes. Regulators, meanwhile, are also learning that the use of emergency approval pathways can lead to lasting changes to expedited processes to speed new drugs and vaccines to patients.

Against this background, the biopharma arena in Japan continued to move ahead, with some significant new advances for oral antivirals, several major licensing deals and approvals for a multitude of new products to fulfil outstanding medical needs - although large-scale M&A activity was on hiatus. It is this broad area of activity across the industry that was acknowledged and celebrated at the event.

We would like to again express our deep and sincere thanks to the expanded panel of 13 distinguished independent judges, who gave so willingly of their expertise, time and effort, and also to our sponsors, who helped make the event possible.

The eight Awards categories span those that applaud the broader achievements of companies, deal-making, advances in R&D and personal accomplishments.

Personal Achievement

The highlight of the evening was the presentation of the Lifetime Achievement Award (sponsored by *ICON PLC*), which went to a recipient recognized by Citeline for his multiple senior research and leadership roles in the Japanese industry – George Nakayama.

Our winner stood out for many reasons, making him an obvious and well-deserved choice. Nakayama became CEO of *Daiichi Sankyo Co., Ltd.* in 2010, which at the time was facing a number of challenges, including the acquisition of *Ranbaxy Laboratories Limited* that was not working out as expected.

Source: Lisa Takagi

Lifetime Achievement Award Winner Joji Nakayama

After an early career in sales for major Japanese brewing group Suntory, in 2002 he became the CEO of a pharma joint venture between that company and Daiichi. He then served as CEO of Daiichi Sankyo through to 2019, thereafter becoming chairman and then a full-time advisor.

During his tenure as CEO, two transformative US acquisitions proved to be key in the future direction of the company, as it made a highly successful strategic pivot towards oncology and away from its previous mainstay cardiovascular medicines – *Plexxikon, Inc.* in 2011 and *Ambit Biosciences Corporation* in 2014.

After playing a major role in the build-up of internal capabilities, expertise and platforms in the cancer area, these efforts paid off in a huge way in 2019, with a huge deal with *AstraZeneca PLC* for antibody-drug conjugates worth up to $6.9bn. Since then, the lead ADC, Enhertu (trastuzumab deruxtecan), has achieved blockbuster status and proven practice-changing in the treatment of breast cancer.

Another highlight of the evening was the Pharma Company of the Year (sponsored by *Syneos Health*), which for 2023 went to *Takeda Pharmaceutical Co. Ltd.* This category, decided by

Citeline's senior editorial team, considered advances in multiple areas including R&D, new product launches, financial performance and licensing and partnering activity.

Takeda signed a landmark deal late last year - worth a massive $4bn upfront – with *Nimbus Therapeutics, Inc.* for a versatile novel drug for immune-mediated disorders, only a few months after another important agreement for a first-in-class Phase II stage oral therapy for celiac disease. Another major alliance followed in early 2023 – a $1bn-plus deal with *HUTCHMED (China) Limited* for the VEGF inhibitor fruquitinib for cancer.

Takeda also marked notable R&D progress, including for the first-in-class enzyme replacement therapy TAK-755 for the ultra-rare disorder congenital thrombotic thrombocytopenic purpura and for its orexin class of novel sleep drugs.

Significant, high-need new product approvals included a dengue vaccine for a viral disease which is endemic to large parts of the world and the first prophylaxis treatment for young children with hereditary angioedema, Takhzyro (lanadelumab). Financially, the company's core operating profit exceed the one trillion yen milestone for the first time last fiscal year.

In the other award for an individual person, Chris Cargill was named Executive of the Year, for the second year in a row, in his role as president and CEO of *Sosei Group Corp.*

The Awards' 13-person independent judging panel of external experts was impressed by his rounded industry knowledge, strong financial background, clear strategy, leadership and delivery of deals and results.

As well as Pharma Company of the Year, Takeda also picked up the Licensing Deal of the Year award, for its agreement with Nimbus for the TYK inhibitor TAK-279. Our panel of judges was impressed not only by the size of this deal but also that it provided a potentially best-in-class molecule as an important addition to the pipeline, in a promising mode of action with broad potential indications with large patient need.

Turning to a category which recognizes innovation and the patient value of a specific individual predict the Best New Drug award (sponsored by *CMIC Group*) went to *Alnylam Pharmaceuticals Inc.*'s Amvuttra (vutrisiran), indicated for a serious, high-need disease – hereditary transthyretin-mediated amyloidosis - scored well based on the benefits of its siRNA technical platform, which allows improved stability, delivery and lower and less frequent dosing.

Company Categories

Moving to the Japan Awards categories recognizing the achievements of individual companies in various areas, the Biotech Company of the Year award (sponsored by *EPS Co. Ltd.*) was won by the Japanese peptide discovery firm *PeptiDream Inc.*.

Our winner in this category has gained attention for multiple big pharma deals that generate a stable income stream, driven by its productive technology platform. A solid pipeline and targeted acquisitions have further added to its success.

The Best Contract Research Organization/Contract Development Manufacturing Organization award was an expanded category this year, widened to include CDMOs. Our winner was A2 Healthcare.

The company, which has built a presence in Taiwan as well as Japan, impressed our panel of judges with its diversified offerings, strength in patient recruitment and initiatives to use electronic approaches to documentation.

Finally, there was one new category in the Citeline Pharma Intelligence Awards Japan 2023, Financing Deal of the Year, designed to recognize companies that were able to raise important new funding through initial public offerings or other forms of financing, it what was a globally challenging environment.

Our winner was the Japanese oncology-focused drug discovery venture *Chordia Therapeutics Inc*, which was seen by the judges as doing well to raise substantial new funding from a broad range of investors in a generally challenging investment climate to ensure long-term financial stability.

The investor interest also provided important validation of its business strategy and pipeline potential.

Congratulations again to all the companies that were nominated and to the winners on the night. Keep an eye on Citeline's social media channels for further pictures and videos from the event.