

MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

Through the many challenges that we have had to face, we have learnt that the world is ever-changing and that we must be agile and adaptable. At HSA, we strive to learn, unlearn and relearn new skills. As we advance, we will continue to hone our professional and scientific expertise, and embrace new digital skills that will enable us to transform to become even more efficient and ready for the journey ahead.



DR CHOONG MAY LING, MIMI
Chief Executive Officer

These past two years have been a challenging period – one which continuously tested us but also taught us many valuable lessons.

We demonstrated our agility, adaptability and resilience by quickly developing and embracing new working methods. As an organisation, we continued to evolve and advance our transformation journey.

Fighting COVID-19

In December 2021, following the first-in-Asia interim authorisation of the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines in 2020 and 2021, HSA approved Pfizer-BioNTech's Comirnaty, transiting it to full registration, and extended its use to children aged 5 to 11 years old. We continued to expedite the review of other vaccine types to facilitate the diversification of Singapore's COVID-19 vaccine portfolio, as well as COVID-19 treatments, via the Pandemic Special Access Route (PSAR). PSAR has allowed us to evaluate data from clinical studies as and when they are ready, allowing for faster, yet thorough reviews.

Under PSAR, we were able to grant interim authorisation for two COVID-19 vaccines – CoronaVac and Nuvaxovid in October 2021 and February 2022, two monoclonal antibody therapies for the treatment of COVID-19 (Sotrovimab, and a combination of Casirivimab and Imdevimab), and Singapore's first oral medicine for COVID-19 treatment – PAXLOVID™.

Additionally, we also put in place the Special Access Route (SAR) in June 2021 to enable healthcare institutions to bring in World Health Organization Emergency Use Listing (WHO-EUL) vaccines, not authorised under PSAR, to vaccinate eligible doctor-supervised patients. As of 31 March 2022, we have approved 521 applications for WHO-EUL vaccines and 47 applications for COVID-19 therapeutics through SAR.

To ensure that safety is not compromised, HSA came up with a vaccine safety monitoring framework for COVID-19 vaccines. Our most intensive effort to date, this framework ensures that emerging public health and safety concerns associated with vaccines are promptly detected and managed, and the public are kept informed through regular Safety Update Reports.

We also worked with key stakeholders, including the Ministry of Health and the Health Promotion Board, to leverage electronic medical records and the National Immunisation Registry records for the active surveillance of COVID-19 vaccines. With these data points, we were able to detect potential safety concerns more effectively, using data analytics and epidemiology studies.

Putting Our Blood Donors First

Even in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, we were heartened by the support of warm-hearted donors who continued to altruistically give their time and blood to patients in need. We continued to have enough blood to meet patients' needs throughout the pandemic.

To ensure a constant and safe supply of blood, we looked at ways to make it more conducive for donors to donate blood regularly. In September 2021, we launched our first-ever DonateBlood mobile app, which was jointly created with the Singapore Red Cross, to give donors easier access to blood donation-related services anytime and anywhere.

To accommodate more donors at our centrally-located Bloodbank@DhobyGhaut (BB@DG), whose daily blood collection has almost doubled since it opened in 2012, we embarked on a renovation project. The new BB@DG features a more spacious donor waiting area and refreshment area for improved donor experience.

Developing New and Improved Techniques

To enable us to deliver top tier scientific services, we focused on innovation to raise our efficiency.

In April 2021, HSA was alerted by overseas regulatory counterparts to the potential of azidomethyl-biphenyl-tetrazole contamination in angiotensin II receptor blocker products. As there were no existing test methods internationally for such analysis, we swiftly moved to develop our own testing methodologies. This initiative enabled our health products regulation arm to take timely and appropriate regulatory actions to safeguard public health.

In another example of innovation at work, we developed a novel DNA testing method to detect cannabis plant material to complement existing methods comprising physical examination and chemical analysis. Using this method, we were able to obtain >99% match to known cannabis references, which is particularly useful in identifying highly fragmented cannabis samples.

Garnering Recognition for Our Contributions

HSA's prompt, proactive facilitation and regulatory agility have enabled Singapore to swiftly roll out essential COVID-19 diagnostic testing and ensure that we are amongst the earliest in the world to access critical vaccines, therapies and medical devices to combat the pandemic. For our efforts, we were awarded a total of three Public Service Transformation awards – two "One Public Service Awards" for building capacity and capability for COVID-19 testing and securing access to vaccines; and the "Agility Award" for our role in supporting Singapore's fight against COVID-19.

I am also extremely proud of HSA achieving WHO's Maturity Level 4 (ML4) – the highest recognition for an advanced medicines regulatory system. HSA is the first agency out of 194 member states to achieve ML4. This achievement comes after a rigorous and comprehensive assessment by a team of WHO-appointed international assessors who looked at over 250 indicators across the entire regulatory lifecycle spanning medicines from clinical trials, marketing authorisation, post-market safety monitoring, audit and licensing of manufacturers and dealers, and laboratory testing of medicines.

Over the year-in-review, we put our scientific expertise to good use by participating in a multi-agency study led by the Singapore Civil Defence Force to investigate the cause of vegetation fires along expressway road dividers. Through our two-year study to analyse mulch samples to determine the volatile organic compounds emitted and the particle size of the samples, we managed to help decrease the number of vegetation fires on our expressways, as well as pick up a Ministry of Home Affairs Ops Excellence Award for our efforts.

I trust that all these external validations will enhance the Singapore public's confidence and trust in HSA's role to protect and advance public health and safety.

Transforming to Advance

Through the many challenges that we have had to face, we have learnt that the world is ever-changing and that we must be agile and adaptable. At HSA, we strive to learn, unlearn and relearn new skills. As we advance, we will continue to hone our professional and scientific expertise, and embrace new digital skills that will enable us to transform to become even more efficient and ready for the journey ahead.