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Swedish American Group Focuses On Cancer, Autoimmune Diseases At Life Science Summit

Gene Marcial, CONTRIBUTOR
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Respected and acclaimed as rock stars in the arcane universe of life sciences, global scientists converged in Stockholm in late August this year for the annual Swedish American Life Science Summit (SALSS) meeting, where they unveiled and dissected revolutionary health care platforms. Among them are the use of robotics in surgery, how nanotechnology may make us "forever young," applications of space technology in life sciences, and the "Moonshot" cancer program initiated by former Vice President Joseph Biden.

Without doubt, global investors are closely watching organizations such as SALSS to discover the latest innovations and discoveries in life science. This area is replete with groups deeply involved in original research. So one of the major topics discussed at the SALSS conference was "impact investing," or why investors should pay closer attention to investing in life science.

"In today's world with an aging population, we observe a higher occurrence of chronic diseases, such as cancer and autoimmune conditions," noted Hans Straberg, chairman of Atlas Copco, and former CEO of Electrolux. "So Big Pharma and the industry are looking beyond the chemical and biologically derived molecules." And as universities and small startups have taken the lead in R&D investments, "Big Pharma is very much dependent on collaborating with them, or acquiring their technologies," he argued.

Today Big Pharma has a "really strong position" in life sciences and are Looking for "new blockbusters to replace current stars that are coming off-patent," he said. The current focus, added Straberg, is "very much on finding cures for diseases like cancer, autoimmunity, allergy and infection," and employing various new technologies.

So new ideas to address a variety of serious medical issues have always attracted medical luminaries to SALSS, and at this year's conference, the speakers included Biden Cancer Initiative Executive Director Gregory Simon, Nobel Foundation chairman Dr. Carl Henrik Heldin, European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries Director-General Richard Bergstrom, and Microsoft Healthcare's chief development officer Mathias Ekman.

Also among the expert speakers were Pfizer executive vice president and chief of the company's worldwide research development Dr. Michael Dolsten, Secretary-General of the Royal Swedish Academy Life Sciences' Dr. Goran Hansson, Google Healthcare and Cloud business manager Ebba Kraemer, China Kindstar Global Diagnostics CEO Shiang Huang, AVRA Medical Robotics founder and CEO Alen York, expert in diabetes-related issues and CEO of Lyfebulb Dr. Karin Hehenberger, and the founder and former chairman of Human Genome Sciences and currently chairman of ACCESS Health International Dr. William A. Haseltine.

"Throughout the years, Swedish research and innovation have led the way to disruptive changes within medicine, which has resulted in an immense impact on people's lives and great value for society," argued Dr. Goran K. Hansson, secretary general of The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences. Today, "we see an increased interest of foreign capital in Swedish Life Science, which the Swedish government embraces," he said. Swedish Life Science players, he added, "look for international expansion

– especially within healthcare services."

One of main focus of this year's SALSS conference was the "Cancer Moonshot," which is now known as the Biden Cancer Initiative, represented by Gregory Simon, founder and executive director of The Biden Cancer Initiative. As part of this year's conference theme of "Moonshot & Beyond," one of the speakers was Swedish astronaut Dr. Christer Fuglesang, who talked about space technology and how it stimulates creativity when applied to life sciences.

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"Part of this year's conference focus was the current transformation of the HealthTech industry, driven by the ICT and tech players rather than by the traditional medtech companies," said Barbro C. Ehnbom, chairman and founder of SALSS. Also significant, she added, was the participation of numerous women at this year's summit, led by the keynote speaker Dr. Bahija Jallal, executive vice president at AsraZeneca and head of Medimmune. " We are proud and glad that so many prominent women are actually SALSS women, including Dr. Jallal, which made this 2017 summit more exceptional," said Ms. Ehnbom.

One of the little known companies that attracted a lot of attention at the conference was AVRA Medical Robotics, a development-stage company based in Orlando, Florida, that has a new generation of "semi-autonomous medical robots for image-capture, navigation, and tissue targeting."

Specifically, these "medical robots" perform computer-assisted surgery, with human medical surgeons operating a remote surgical device via a console. In fact, they are not really robots as we know them: AVRA has developed a "novel and truly robotic single-arms platform for the field of aesthetics, skin and wound care as well as dermato-plastic surgery," said Barry F. Cohen, AVRA's CEO and founder. The company's first design integrates software, image guidance, navigation and targeting systems, to allow autonomous needling of skin, he explained.

"The future of surgery will be determined by success in gaining precision access to anny area of the human body with the smallest incisions and deploying therapies to specific tissues, glands and organs," asserted Alen York, an AVRA senior executive. Limitations in conventional surgeries, he said, are "demanding more autonomous, intelligent robot systems that go beyond the capability of a human being." AVRA'S platform focused on needling technology "represents a key breakthrough in aesthetics, wound care, and autonomous drug delivery platforms, integration of artificial intelligence and augmented reality that will allow," says York, for a new paradigm in surgical training, planning and treatment.

SmartwiseSweden AB is another young biotech that presened at SALSS. It has developed what it calls the Extroducer, a micro catheter for injecting cells, biologics and small molecule therapy directly into organs. "The tiny diameter of the Extroducer, with the width of a hair, enables the needle to penetrate the blood vessel wall and deliver a payload via the smallest blood vessels in the body, making perviously inaccessible regions now available to direct tissue projection," said Jonthan Clarke, CEO of Smartwise. Its product is the first of its kind of versatile device that allows for direct local injection of substances into multiple organs, such as the heart, pancreas, liver and kidney.

"We have shown successful and safe pre-clinical delivery of insulin producing cells into the pancreas and modified RNA to the heart," said Clarke, who admitted that he is in talks with multiple major pharmaceutical companies for licensing or other agreements to advance production. Smartwise is still privately owned.

ProLung, a Salt Lake city-based biotechnology company focused singularly on improving lung cancer survival, has developed a breakthrough test with precision volume-averaging "bioconductive technology" to collect data to generate a personalized score indicating the likelihood of malignancy. With an estimated one billion people at high-risk for lung cancer worldwide, it has the lowest five-year survival rate, or 16%, of all major cancers, and is the leading cause of cancer death, said Steven C. Eror, founder, president and CEO of ProLung. The copany's test is non-invasive and non-radiating that reduces the wait time from months to just one day, he added.

The test has received a "CE Mark and ISO 13485" manufacturing certificate and is approved for sale in the EEA and EFTA countries, said Eror. In the U.S., the ProLung test is still for investigational use only and undergoing multi-site clinical trials for FDA clearance as a "510(k) device," he added.

Because the annual SALSS coference has attracted exerts worldwiude, it has become a central focus for life science companies to present and exhibit their new products or novel technology to a growing number of medical and scientific experts looking for the next breakthrough product in life sciences.