

DaringCircles

by the Women's Forum for the Economy & Society

#Women4Business

Leading through adversity: Women entrepreneurs and Covid-19

A series of interviews by the Women4Business Daring Circle

Interview with Harjit Gill

CEO, Asia Pacific Medical Technology Association

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 **WOMEN'S FORUM**
FOR THE ECONOMY & SOCIETY



#Women4Business Interviews

How are women being impacted by COVID-19, and how are they leading to address the challenges faced by others? To learn, The Women's Forum for the Economy and Society is conducting a series of interviews with women entrepreneurs and ambassadors for women's empowerment around the world.

These interviews are unveiling unique insights into the far-reaching impacts of Covid-19, and the diverse ways these inspiring women are responding to the crisis with leadership and innovation.

Beyond recovery: designing an inclusive world

In the face of the new reality instilled by this pandemic, we are bound together more than ever. Let's dial up our solidarity as we design an inclusive recovery: for the women who continue to be disproportionately affected, and for everyone else who needs their leadership and positive impact. This crisis has reminded us of how critical our work is: of the urgent need to reshape the world together, driven by our **common purpose** to accelerate inclusive progress.

We care. We share. We dare.

Harjit Gill, CEO, Asia Pacific Medical Technology Association

The Women's Forum met with Harjit Gill, Chief Executive Officer of the Asia Pacific Medical Technology Association. APACMed is the only regional association to provide a unified voice for the medical technology industry in Asia Pacific. Harjit was previously the EVP and CEO of Philips ASEAN & Pacific, and held a variety of international roles with Philips over two decades. Passionate about innovation and healthcare reform, Harjit holds concurrent positions on several prestigious Boards. She is the former Singapore Chapter Chair of the Young Presidents Organisation, the world's premier leadership organisation of Chief Executives, a former Board member of the National University of Singapore Entrepreneurship Committee, and member of the World Economic Forum Global Agenda Council on South East Asia.

You have a diverse range of professional experience across different industries Harjit. What was your main inspiration and motivation for the career path you have chosen? Do you feel that being a woman has influenced any of your ambitions or work choices?

In the early part of my career my main motivation was to learn and grow. I proactively planned my career steps e.g. different countries, different sectors, and ensured the support of a good mentor and coach. I was also keen to work in a global environment as I enjoyed the diversity of working with different cultures. In the latter part of my career it was extremely important for me to work in a space that I was passionate about and one where I could add value – hence the move to healthcare.

As a working mother, naturally I have had to balance certain aspects of my career, however I have always been committed to making this work. I am a better mother and professional because of this balance. In addition to this, managing a dual career with my husband was important. Sometimes this was a challenge and inevitably compromises had to be made, but overall, we would not choose to do things differently.

We have seen the coronavirus pandemic expose weaknesses in healthcare infrastructure around the world. What are the biggest challenges for the healthcare system, in Asia in general, and in Singapore in particular? Do you see women being impacted differently though these challenges?

With close to 5 million cases and 320,000 deaths, the coronavirus pandemic continues to place immense pressure on healthcare systems around the world. From the outset, the speed with which the virus spread led to shortages in key items such as Ventilators and PPE's. In addition to this it becomes clearer that a sense of normalcy can only return once we have a vaccine.

Like other countries Singapore has been focused on fighting and controlling this pandemic. Like a few other Asian countries we learnt some key lessons from the SARS outbreak in 2002, such as track and trace. This has helped in containing the spread of the virus. Lastly with regards to women and covid-19, statistics show they fare better than men with a higher survival rate!

“ It was extremely important for me to work in a space that I was passionate about and one where I could add value – hence the move to healthcare. ”

In what way can medical technology be leveraged to support governments, businesses, communities, and individuals navigating the impacts of COVID-19? Is your association providing any critical services or support?

The healthcare industry is at the forefront of the global fight against covid-19. Now more than ever we need to come together to forge new and innovative partnerships across the broader healthcare landscape – manufacturers, health officials, policy makers, healthcare practitioners, start-up incubators, service providers, and academic institutions. As a trade association our role has been instrumental in facilitating this dialogue. We have brought our industry together in several ways during this crisis, for example, accelerating regulatory reform, building advocacy with governments and key policy makers, and highlighting the reforms needed for digital innovation.

Do you see any positive opportunities arising from this crisis, for the health sector and for women entrepreneurs and business leaders?

There have been several opportunities arising from this crisis, the scalable adoption of new digital solutions such as telemedicine, collaboration in the race for a vaccine with GSK, and Sanofi, and the coming together of big tech Google and Apple on contact tracing.

Most importantly though, I believe we now begin to really value the importance of having a strong healthcare infrastructure. This pandemic has highlighted the critical need to invest in this, and for Asia this is paramount if we are to ensure healthcare access for all.

What key message would you like to share with other women business leaders and entrepreneurs at this time?

Carpe Diem! The Healthcare industry is going through a major transformation which will result in many interesting partnerships and opportunities. We need women leaders to help shape and accelerate this, so please join us!

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The Women4Business Daring Circle is a global coalition of partners, with an ambition to promote and accelerate women's economic empowerment in business and supply chains.

The Daring Circle is led by P&G, in collaboration with Accenture, BNP Paribas, Bouygues, Exxon Mobil, Johnson & Johnson, L'Oréal and Publicis Groupe. The Circle is supported by Knowledge Partner AT Kearney, Insight Partner Clifford Chance, and Institutional Partners WEConnect International and UN Women. Expert Partners include BY.O Group, founder of Catalyst at Large Suzanne Biegel, HEC, senior expert in gender Meg Jones, and founder of the Global Business Coalition for Women's Economic Empowerment Linda Scott.