Lundbeck Mexico – Oscar Parra, General Manager



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Tags: CNS diseases

Oscar Parra, general manager at Lundbeck Mexico, explains the seriousness of CNS diseases in increasingly urbanized countries and the impact they can have on the productivity of the Mexican workforce.

The last time we met was in 2012. How have central nervous system (CNS) diseases evolved in Mexico over this time and what does this mean for Lundbeck?

CNS diseases are very common worldwide and have been constantly growing also in Mexico, yet remain often under-diagnosed and undertreated. When patients describe symptoms such as fatigue, physicians often prescribe vitamins or simply blame it on the age. As a result the problem persists and, as with all chronic diseases, worsens over time. Often it is not the patient who seeks help, but for his or her caregivers. This is the case for pathologies such as Alzheimer's, which is always a heavy burden on the family, or psychosis, which is also a hugely debilitating disease. All these diseases put you completely out of wellbeing, disable you from managing your life and are costly for both patients and families.

Just to make a parallel, diabetes is a very serious pathology, too. However, looking at the overall disability caused, CNS-related issues are such as depression are substantially more debilitating than diabetes or heart problems. We are proud to be in a segment where we can really make a difference and it is our mission to empower patients to keep living their healthy lives.

Elena Medina Mora, director of the National Institute for Psychiatry Ramón Fuente, told us that one in four Mexicans aged 18 to 65 has suffered from some kind of mental illness in their life. Which are the diseases that mostly impact on the Mexican population and why?

Depression is most definitely a disease that is affecting Mexico and it is a very serious case for the nation. In fact, the number of days taken off as a consequence of depression is 2.7 higher than those lead by chronic diseases. This is because there are normally three scenarios that can happen at the workplace. The first scenario sees the patient leaving the office because he cannot cope with the responsibility. The second scenario sees the patient showing up at the office but underperform. In the worst case scenario the patient is laid off because of this underperformance.

In increasingly urbanized countries such as Mexico, people are more exposed to stressful conditions, which consequently result in additional cases of depression. Another issue that is hitting Mexico is the ageing population, which comes with a growing risk of Alzheimer's and dementia. In fact, statistically, the older you are the more prone you are to CNS disorders such as Parkinson disease or Alzheimer's.

Are there any specific activities you have in place to promote discussion and the sharing of information about CNS diseases and the effect they can have on Mexico's economy?

One of the main flagships of Mexico as a country is productivity. Therefore we take it upon our responsibility to share our knowledge in terms of figures and statistics with relevant authorities. It is definitely important to increase awareness on the effect depression can have on the Mexican economy so we do our best to bring this up to different associations and government officials. Part of our responsibility is also to share our knowledge with the medical community, especially our R&D activities. Our global presence makes us very knowledgeable on the impact depression is having in Europe, the US and Asia for instance. So we often share this information with local physicians and authorities. In addition, the Lundbeck Institute, which is separated from the commercial side of the organization, is primarily focused on the promotion of knowledge between the top minds of the field. This is a great advantage for our company especially from a scientific perspective. The Lundbeck foundation regularly gives grants for R&D and this greatly strengthens our organization.

The OMS estimates that depression will be the most recurrent cause of working disability within the next decade. This has seen the priorities on the agenda to shift

towards prevention and long-term goals. What other changes have you noticed?

Mexican authorities are increasingly focusing on the long-term impact of CNS diseases. They have to balance their aims across different factors but looking back at when I first entered this industry, I can say with confidence that things have change drastically. In fact, depression was not considered a disease at the time and society would tend to just label people as weak. Today, CNS diseases are very well accepted and recognized as illnesses that require treatment. There is still a long way to go but we are definitely moving towards the right direction.

How are you working with patients to make sure families have the required support to treat depression?

It is always a complex issue when a significant other is left to deal with depression. Doctors can advise, but are not able to be present every step of the way. At Lundbeck we do our best to provide practical information to ease the way families can deal with CNS disorders. We have also launched a mobile application dedicated to patients with depression. The idea with the app was to develop a tool that can facilitate tracking the progress of medication and the effects it is having on the disease. This can help as the patient is given a visual reminder of his or her progress, which is psychologically very encouraging.

Lundbeck is in the process of expanding its international reach. Today a substantial amount of sales come from international markets. What role does the Mexican affiliate play?

Mexico is clearly one of the priority markets for Lundbeck. International markets are due to become more prominent for the revenue of the company and, looking at international trends, I personally believe this makes a lot of sense. Revenues will increasingly come from Asia and Latin America. In Mexico, Lundbeck has a broader portfolio than in other markets. We are also in the process of renewing our product base and will soon be launching some new products in the area of depression. We have been preparing the launch of Brintellix®, for example, which will be out at the beginning of next year.

Where do you envision Lundbeck in the next five years and what impact do you hope to have on the treatment of CNS diseases in Mexico?

Lundbeck is committed to the treatment of CNS diseases. Several new products will be launched in the next years and our plan is to grow within the segment. We are always trying to improve the life of patients, regardless of their type of illness. There is still a lot of work to be done in this area. But

we are doing something great and seeing the effect that treatment has on patients with depression or Alzheimer’s is just incredible. I am very proud to be working for a company that can impact people’s lives for the better.

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