Interview: Rodrigo Puga – Country Manager, Pfizer Mexico



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Rodrigo Puga, the recently appointed general manager of Pfizer Mexico, documents his strategic priorities to further strengthen the company's performance in Mexico and consolidate Pfizer's leadership within the Mexican market and the overall healthcare eco-system of the country.

You were appointed country manager of Pfizer Mexico in June 2016, while you previously were country manager of Pfizer Colombia for two and half years and also held various senior positions in Argentina, Chile and Peru – always at Pfizer. Four months after you took over, what excites you the most about your new responsibilities?

I am particularly enthusiastic about all the challenges and opportunities that the Mexican healthcare eco-system holds. Mexico, the second most populous country in Latin America, has been greatly developing the access of its population to quality healthcare over the past decade, notably through the implementation of Seguro Popular.

Although Mexico's health context has indisputably been evolving in the right direction, we however still identify substantial room for improvement in terms of innovation access, which also entails promising growth opportunities for the pharmaceutical companies implanted in the country. In this regard, Pfizer, like all other healthcare stakeholders involved in Mexico, has a crucial role to play in further moving the Mexican healthcare system forward and contributing to increase health outcomes accessible to Mexican patients.

Pfizer structure has evolved into three distinct business divisions: Innovative Health, Essential Health, and Consumer Health. What are the strategic priorities you have set yourself in order to further propel the growth of the affiliate?

Our overarching objective is to further consolidate our leadership position in the country, and all our teams are highly committed to reach this fundamental target. Considering we already are market leaders in Mexico, growing at a similar pace as the overall Mexican market will already stand as a remarkable achievement for the upcoming years – although we may actually slightly outperform the market's growth in 2016.

For our Innovative Health division, our objective is to bring to Mexican patients all the life-changing treatments we hold in our global portfolio, which is mainly centered on rare and inflammatory diseases, and oncology. For example, we are currently launching in Mexico our new treatment for metastatic breast cancer. This product truly stands out as a breakthrough therapy, and physicians across the world have already embraced it as a standard of care in the first-line setting. Overall, we expect this division to be our key growth driver over the upcoming years, followed by our Consumer Care activities.

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Regarding our Essential Health portfolio (formerly the Established Products business, e.d.), which represents around 60 percent of our total sales in Mexico and comprises more than 160 products, we will concentrate our efforts on refining our distribution strategy and increasing the access to our products across the entire country. We also want to launch all the products we received from the acquisition of Hospira, which was closed in September 2015. In this regard, Pfizer successfully launched its first biosimilar, in 2015 – and this product category will play a crucial role within the growth strategy of our Essential Health division. As a matter of fact, Pfizer globally has seven biosimilars under development, which will be gradually introduced into the Mexican market within the next five years. Finally, we are also launching our "Pfizer Vitales" portfolio, which gathers high quality, affordable generics treatments targeting critical therapeutic areas such as pain management, central nervous system, cardiovascular diseases and erectile dysfunction. One of the key specificities of this portfolio is the product presentation, which has been specifically designed to improve patients' adherence to their treatments.

In terms of Consumer Health products, we want to strengthen some of our key brands, such as Advil®, Centrum®, or Caltrate®, by further expanding these strategic product lines in the upcoming months.

This recent appointment is your first occasion to operate within the Mexican healthcare eco-system. What have been your first impressions when engaging with the country's main stakeholders, from the Secretary of Health to Cofepris and the main social security institutions, IMSS, ISSSTE, and Seguro Popular?

My perception is extremely positive: I feel a real and sound willingness from all these key stakeholders to engage and collaborate with the industry in general and with Pfizer in particular.

Mexico's overall health investment revolves around 6.2 percent of the country's GDP, and the OECD recently pointed out it will be impossible to significantly improve health outcomes without increasing health investment. Nevertheless, the pharmaceutical industry cannot content itself with only highlighting this fact: heightening healthcare outcomes in Mexico truly stands as a shared responsibility. Beside our fundamental mission to bring innovative treatments, we also have to work in partnership with public stakeholders to develop and implement new market access models, which will allow more Mexican patients to ultimately benefit from our life-changing treatments.

Most of Pfizer's innovative products target very specific and unmet healthcare needs, for example in oncology and rare diseases. As a company, Pfizer is particularly open to implement various innovative access options, including risk-sharing and pay-for-performance models, to ensure we find the right solutions that will truly meet the needs of our partners. Nevertheless, in Mexico, a " one-size-fits-all" approach is doomed to fail: we need to develop customized access strategies for all our therapies, and also for all the different social security institutions that constitute the Mexican public health system.

In terms of market access, Pfizer Mexico has been definitely moving to the right direction over the past years. Nevertheless, we need to further upgrade and speed up our own processes, in order to offer attractive access solutions to all the different payers, for all our upcoming products.

When we met with Dr. Narro, Mexico's Secretary of Health, he highlighted that "the private and public sectors truly are complementary in the fundamental objective to increase patient outcomes". What will be Pfizer's contribution to this endeavor?

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Pfizer has historically been highly committed to the Mexican health eco-system, and we recently announced an additional 280-million pesos investment in clinical research. We already boast an extremely comprehensive network of research partnerships in the country, currently conducting 70 clinical protocols through more than 400 R&D centers across the country. We also want to increase

the number of Mexican centers involved in our “INSPIRE” (Investigator Networks, Site Partnerships and Infrastructure for Research Excellence) site program, through which our most impactful and groundbreaking clinical protocols are conducted. In Mexico, we already count five “INSPIRE” research centers, and we plan to open a new one every year. This strong commitment will allow Mexican patients to be among the first in the world to access some of the most innovative treatments currently under development, while also fortifying the R&D ecosystem of the country.

Furthermore, Pfizer Mexico is strongly supporting AMIIF [the association gathering the pharmaceutical innovators implanted in the country, e.d] in conducting scientific studies that demonstrate how investing in healthcare directly contributes to increase the country’s productivity and its competitiveness, in addition to generate positive health outcomes for our patients. While the Mexican economy is currently facing headwinds, our industry needs to generate the real world evidences that showcase how healthcare will be crucial to propel the future growth of our country.

You have been pursuing an ascendant career at Pfizer over the last 19 years, and Mexico stands the largest affiliate you have ever been heading. From a personal standpoint, what are some of your past experiences that will help you make a success of this new challenge?

Before Mexico, I had the great pleasure to work in Colombia, Argentina, Chile, Peru, Bolivia, Uruguay and Paraguay. All these Latin markets are particularly similar from a cultural aspect. In terms of leadership for example, in all these countries, it is critical to win the hearts and minds of your people if you want them to perform at the best of their abilities. From a management standpoint, this stands as a completely different context than in the US. As a result, my management style truly takes its roots from the field: when I arrive in a new market, I spend a lot of my time among our teams and our customers to genuinely understand what are the real challenges they face, but also the improvement opportunities they identify. To ensure all collaborators are fully committed to their mission, their insights truly have to be integrated within the decision process.

On the other hand, my diverse Latin American experiences have provided me with a complete understanding of the dynamics occurring throughout the continent. There is an incredible array of market specificities that truly sets each of these healthcare systems apart from another. Some countries for example display great levels of market access – like Argentina or even Colombia, while we still see important access gaps in countries like Bolivia and Peru. Every time I face a challenging situation in Mexico, I will be able to build on the successful solutions that Pfizer has been implementing in the countries I have already worked in.

Nevertheless, a solution that has proven being successful in Chile could not be exactly replicated in Mexico. Working in many different eco-systems however strengthens the capacity to tailor ideas and solutions to the local context in which the decision maker operates. In a complex market such as Mexico, which moreover displays significant specificities, this Latin American experience will undoubtedly be useful to implement both innovative and locally customized solutions.

In which specific areas do you want to establish Pfizer Mexico as a “best in class” among the global Pfizer eco-system?

Without any doubt, the first area where we should display a pioneering approach is market access. Working toward this fundamental objective will stand as the essential part of my mission at the head of the Mexican affiliate.

The second one relates to talent management. Talent acquisition is absolutely crucial to the development of our affiliate: when you have the right people at the right place, it is easier to develop and implement the solutions the company and its partners need. We were recently ranked first –for the third consecutive year- of the pharmaceutical industry with the best corporate reputation by The Corporate Reputation Monitor (MERCO), notably because our stakeholders fully acknowledge the quality of Pfizer’s employees and managers. It undoubtedly is the talent and the dedication of our people that will nurture our future successes in Mexico. As a result, I want to ensure we continue to hire and develop our human resources, following the successful strategy that has been allowing Pfizer to establish itself as the market leader in Mexico and globally.

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