Interview: Roberto Tapia-Conyer – General Director, Carlos Slim Foundation, Mexico



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Roberto Tapia-Conyer, General Director at the Carlos Slim Foundation, explains the unique position of the Foundation to develop and introduce innovation that could create breakthroughs in the National Healthcare System as well as enhance patients' quality of life.

Could you please give our international audience an update on the operations and accomplishments of the Carlos Slim Foundation since we last met you in 2015?

Our main goal as a foundation is to make disruptive progress through helping public institutions to embrace innovation such as genomics. In this sense, we are extensively working in reducing the health gap between the developing and developed countries. Technology and innovation can certainly create breakthroughs to health and Carlos Slim Foundation acts as a bridge between the existing innovation in other countries and what needs to be implemented in Mexico. Additionally, the Foundation helps to develop the capabilities and infrastructure that are already in the country. In order to support our operations, we have strong partnerships with both public and private institutions such as the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard, and all the leading Mexican health institutions.

It is important to mention that we enjoy a unique position in the industry since we are not a company but are sustained by private profits; therefore, we can be more flexible when taking additional risks to explore new innovation areas or new lines of action.

What is your overview of the innovation landscape in Mexico?

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I have seen a lot of innovation developed in Mexico but, even though Cofepris has made outstanding progress to really incorporate such advancements, the international community does not perceive Mexico as an attractive place to develop and implement its R&D activities because of the reimbursement system.

We are fully aware of this reality and therefore the foundation is focused on generating the evidences to support every innovation we are trying to implement in Mexico to introduce them into public policy. We strongly believe that we can generate within the model a positive eco-system through R&D; the Foundation acts as a bridge between the national and international innovation areas and the Mexican system as a public policy to be finally financed by the government.

The Carlos Slim Foundation contributes to accelerating the adoption of innovation trends such as genomics in Mexico's health system. What is the main challenge that you have identified to accomplishing this goal and what has been your strategy to ensure the success of the Foundation?

The main challenge is to identify the right change that should be generated in Mexico. Our strategy to overcome such challenge is to construct the strongest evidence that ensures that every line of action that we are developing is in the right direction. Our ultimate goal is the well-being of the people that is currently or could be positively impacted by our initiatives.

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Therefore, we have a clear process that starts by choosing the right idea to develop, continues by building up the evidence that creates confidence around the initiative, and ends by designing the action plan to transform such idea into a reality. It is not an easy task to innovate in an industry that is known for its traditionalism, but we have been able to create interesting healthcare breakthroughs in Mexico.

We have perceived a demographic as well as epidemiologic transition in Mexico with an ageing population and a stronger focus of the government on chronic diseases treatment. How has this trend affected your operations?

We have been aligned with this transition for already a decade when we helped the Ministry of Health to design its agenda, which included chronic diseases, maternal and child health, and

vaccinology. In this sense, we have developed digital platforms that accurately track the advancements in each one of the aforementioned national healthcare pillars to bring appropriate health services to all the different economic social classes.

The Foundation has three main lines of action: developing solutions, establishing alliances, and acting as a catalyst. Could you expand on how is Carlos Slim Foundation advancing in each one of such big guidelines?

We are highly involved in developing those initiatives or solutions that create health breakthroughs to the Mexican system. Expanding on our alliances approach, we are already collaborating with the top national and international health institutions generating value through a win-win relationship that supports the success of the initiatives that the Foundation is currently involved in. Concreting on our role as a catalyst, all the projects of the Foundation in areas such as chronic diseases and vaccinology are aimed to become a reality and Carlos Slim Foundation ensures such transition.

Carlos Slim Foundation is leading impactful projects such as Casalud, Amanece, Genomics and Vaccinology sorted out in Life quality, Innovation, Prevention, and Development. Which ones are the initiatives that you are most proud of?

There is a lot of potential in each one of them, therefore it is hard to say. However, we are a team of 22 highly qualified employees with PhDs and masters' degrees that have ensured the success of each one of the lines of actions that the Foundation has developed throughout its history; this is certainly something that make me feel really satisfied.

Nonetheless, I would like to highlight Casalud because of its bigger impact in the Mexican population. Indeed, the Casalud model is currently being operated in more than 12,000 public health units across the country in partnership with the Ministry of Health; leading firms such as Deloitte have evaluated the initiative as an outstanding model worldwide. In terms of future, we are going to create positive national breakthroughs in the vaccinology and organ transplant platforms.

Furthermore, the Foundation is also highly involved in the development of healthcare human resources; in fact, Carlos Slim Foundation is providing more than 15,000 scholarships to educate healthcare professionals such as nurses and physicians. To reinforce this initiative, we have also developed a digital platform that offers online diplomas for approximately 16,000 primary healthcare workers, and that also reaches the general population to increase the awareness about daily care through general health content.

When we had the pleasure to meet with Mexico's Secretary of Health, Dr. Narro Robles, he highlighted the importance of building up public-private partnerships to ensure the quality and the goals of the national health system leveraging on government and companies' resources. As the CEO of the leading health foundation in Mexico, how do you think that PPPs will help to reduce the healthcare gap in Mexico and what is the Foundation doing to foster such alliances?

I am totally aligned with such assumption and it is certainly the path of development. Indeed, it is a reality that the government does not have enough financial and structural resources to fulfill the national needs. Therefore, the public sector needs to leverage on private capabilities to reach the national health goals.

The Foundation is not a public institution but it is neither business oriented; Carlos Slim Foundation is positioned as the leading national social entity financed by its own resources. We are the best choice to partner with in order to implement innovation that will create breakthroughs in the Mexican healthcare system enhancing the way the health services are delivered and, consequently, the quality of life of the population.

The foundation is strongly devoted to creating solutions to help solving the principal health issues in Mexico but also within the rest of the region. As CEO of Carlos Slim Foundation, could you expand on the regional reach of the foundation?

Our regional reach is mostly through the Salud Mesoamérica Initiative that we are currently running in partnership with Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and other entities. The Salud Mesoamérica Initiative is an innovative public/private partnership that seeks to reduce health equity gaps in Central America countries faced by those living in extreme poverty.

What are the key healthcare objectives in Mexico City that you would like to achieve in the upcoming three years?

The main priority on my agenda is to consolidate our initiatives to make them successful and sustainable constructing the strongest evidences that will ensure that such innovations are properly embedded within the national healthcare system. Secondly, one of my objectives is to ensure that such actions already implemented will remain in the future; this will certainly mean that the Foundation has been successful. Finally, I want to ensure that the Foundation will continue choosing those initiatives that suit best to Mexico in order to reach as much people as possible creating breakthroughs in both the national healthcare system and people's quality of life.

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