Interview: Francois Léger – General Manager, Servier Colombia

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Francois Léger, recently appointed GM of Servier Colombia discusses his strategy to achieve the company's ambitious growth plans to launch eight new products within the next three years.

You have been appointed General Manager four months ago. Can you introduce yourself to our executive readership? Being originally from France and having a globally diversified career, what motivated you to come to Colombia?

Taking over Servier's Colombian affiliate was a great personal achievement. Referring specifically to Servier Colombia, it has been an exciting time to join a professional and motivated team here. Even though we are a young affiliate established in 2014, we have a plethora of projects ahead and ambitious plans for the future. Additionally, I identified an excellent opportunity to work in a country that has great potential. It has been a personal satisfaction to come to Colombia and get a chance to discover this lovely country and the Latin American region.

Being in the country for a few months now, what are your first impressions of Colombia's pharmaceutical industry and healthcare system?

Colombian's healthcare system may seem complex at first due to regular changes and adaptations in terms of market access. However, when put in the regional perspective, it showcases a lot of advantages in terms of access, equipment, scientific level and collaboration between the industry. It is the best healthcare system in the region and one of the best worldwide, with about 97 percent

of coverage and an out of the pocket system, which means wide access to healthcare services. The healthcare market is regularly evolving trying to balance the private and public system, while institutional market is tending to grow faster than the private. Indeed, the level of equipment they have been offering is impressive. Regarding the pharmaceutical industry, the sales representatives frequently meet with physicians and it represents a simple process of scheduling meetings on a regular basis, which can happen up to three times a month.

The Colombian affiliate was set up in 2014. What have been the main milestones since then?

Servier has been present in Colombia since before 2014, but solely through our distributors. When finally establishing an affiliate, and becoming an independent company in Colombia, the main focal point was directed towards building the entire business: commercial and institutional which also implies employing the right team that is a fit to grow the business in the newly established operation. Up to now, we are proud to have constructed and experienced this early stage in a very positive and successful manner. This year, we expect to reach 10 million USD in revenues. Today, we are ranked in the top 50 pharmaceutical companies in Colombia with 0.3 percent market share, and we have the ambition of reaching one percent of the market share along with a turnover of 40 million USD within the next five years. As emerging markets currently present a reliable and sustainable source of growth for Servier, the Colombian operations play a significant role by achieving annual growth of 35 percent with further ambitions to grow 25 percent every year.

Servier offers a diverse range of innovative products in cardiovascular, diabetes, depression and angiology. Where do you identify your main growth drivers? What are the best performing and most prospective products?

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Our main therapeutic area is cardiovascular diseases. However, our product portfolio features a wide range of products in diabetes, hypertension, depression and chronic venous disease. Each of these categories shows a lot of potential for further growth. Currently, we have a great pipeline, with the ambition to launch eight products in the next three years. We are proud of this, especially being still a young affiliate in the country.

Servier is investing 27 percent of its turnover in R&D. What is the contribution of the Colombian affiliate to the global innovation of Servier?

Servier’s development centre for Latin America are based in Argentina, Brazil and Mexico. Referring to the Colombian operations, we are looking to strengthen our presence in the clinical trials arena. Nonetheless, we already had a clinical trial for cardiovascular disease and we expect to enter some in the oncology area very promptly. In addition, our efforts are directed towards advancing the education level of particular diseases such as coronary artery disease, heart failure and depression. Therefore, we collaborate with doctors and patients to contribute to a better comprehension and the management of the disease.

Globally, Servier is nurturing collaborations with public research organizations. What has been your partnership strategy to further extend the impact of your work?

It is indeed in Servier’s corporate philosophy to ensure the sustainable growth of the company. We recognize the value of our partnerships and the strong value proposition they can offer. It is no difference for the Colombian operations. Currently, we have partnerships with the main scientific organizations in several areas including cardiology, psychiatry, chronic diseases and oncology. In line with that, our future initiatives will involve extending those and bringing them to the spotlight of our action plans.

What measures will you implement to ensure the future growth of the affiliate?

Our growth strategy can be divided in several parts: developing the current product portfolio, introducing new products to the market and growing in the institutional market. As already mentioned, we have big plans for current and upcoming products.

Servier Colombia is operating under the mission to offer real added value in the medical industry in Colombia. What is Servier’s contribution to the innovative ecosystem of Colombia?

Our contribution to the Colombian market is seen through radical and disruptive innovations already present in the market, yet also breakthrough products in the pipeline to be launched in the near future. Moreover, we are targeting more clinical trials while entering the oncology therapeutic line. However, our efforts are not only invested in the development of new products, but also in helping patients and doctors to increase their knowledge in many therapeutic areas as our belief is that we can achieve a better and exceptional healthcare system, together and through mutual collaboration and educational advancement.

What do you want our readers to think when they hear the name Servier?

Science, innovation and ethics are at the core of everything we do. We are working towards achieving the highest scientific results and bringing new innovation, while applying ethical standards of practice.

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How has your background helped shape your leadership style and driven the success of this new challenge?

I love the challenge of meeting new cultures and understanding the way they work and communicate. It is indeed an interesting experience embellished with a lot of love and joy on the way. Prior to working in Colombia, I have had an opportunity to meet a lot of different countries which led to my main acknowledge of having to adapt to the people and their culture; the way people communicate is of crucial importance and therefore you have to listen. I have been in Colombia for three months and I take a lot of advice from my team- from simple advice of sending an email to more complex business issues. Personally, I love this early stage of familiarizing yourself with the country, with the language and the way they communicate and do business. It is never easy, but being already in these situations, I have learnt the steps of gradual integration.

What final message would you like to send to our executive readership?

After spending only three months in the country, my impressions related specifically to the country are more than just positive; I have witnessed a lot of potential due to political, economic and educational reasons. Therefore, I am fulfilled for being here with Servier to advance and assist to the development of healthcare system in Colombia. As many countries worldwide, the Colombian population is ageing- it is still young, with an average age being 26- however, the pyramid is changing and we need to be prepared for these transformations. In line with this, Servier is developing and working on continuous improvement of product portfolio adapted to aging population. Finally, Servier is an opened company aiming to work with all stakeholders to contribute to our mission as a pharmaceutical company and advance the healthcare system overall.

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