Interview: Yolanda Alagón – General Manager, Janssen, Colombia



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Yolanda Alagón, general manager of Janssen Colombia, discusses the company's footprint in Colombia and Latin America and her strategy for the affiliate moving forward.



You have been appointed General Manager three years ago, becoming one of the first women to lead a pharma company in Latin America. You mentioned your goal is to "contribute to growth that should be driven by better and greater access to pharmacological treatments, to improve the health and quality of life of people." What steps have you been taking to achieve this goal?

Following the Janssen's core philosophy to bring innovative solutions to the market and establishing ourselves as a transformational innovative company, we are aiming to provide the Colombian market with equal result. Colombia is displaying the same medical needs as the rest of the globe, which is something very relevant when it comes to providing the right treatments. Personally, I brought a strong expertise working in the pharmaceutical industry in Spain and I have

been focused now, as general manager of Janssen in Colombia, on identifying the market needs and familiarising myself with the Colombian market in order to contribute to advancing the healthcare system and leveraging on my previous experience to adjust to the needs of the Colombian operations. Janssen Colombia is modifying its operational model to advance the collaboration between the functional and commercial side and better serve the stakeholders. In addition, Colombia is offering a great talent pool of highly capable and well-trained people. Janssen Colombia is strongly focusing on promoting talent within the organization and is supporting the professional development of its people in order to reap benefits for both the company and employees.

In 2013, when we interviewed Mario Sturion, he mentioned that Colombia is a key country of focus for Janssen in Latin America. How has the importance of Colombian market evolved in four years?

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Colombia is a market of great importance, as it represents one of the most advanced economies in Latin America. From both the political and the economic point of view, Colombia is more stable in comparison to the rest of the region and it is a market of 50 million inhabitants with different medical needs. Additionally, Colombia instills a lot of confidence for the global organization, which is why we will be opening a service center in Bogota for the region of Latin America by the end of 2017. Consequently, we will be employing 200 additional employees that will be working together towards the common goal of providing the best service to our customers. It is a significant achievement considering the fact that Janssen will establish only five service centers worldwide- one of them being the one in Bogota attending the needs of the Latin American region.

Can you provide an overview of Janssen’s operations in Colombia?

Janssen has a long-standing presence in Colombia- it has been present since 1986. During this time, Colombia has been experiencing its highs and lows in political and economic terms. Janssen prides itself in being present in Colombia at all times, accompanying patients and providing them with first-class medical solutions. One of the major milestones in 30 years of existence has certainly been the establishment in 2010 of the regional cluster in Bogota, serving as a hub for Peru and Ecuador and aiming to contribute significantly to the well-being and improvement of the quality of life of the population in the three countries. Ever since, the Colombian affiliate has become of significant importance due to becoming a regional platform. As an upstanding member of the community, we took responsibility for the performance of Peru and Ecuador. Our collective

efforts have been directed towards developing products for onco-hematology, immunology, infectious diseases and central nervous system, from which patients can benefit and medical needs can be satisfied. Currently, the Colombian affiliate has more resources to make this happen, however we are also investing in both Ecuador and Peru in furtherance of providing necessary treatments to address the local needs. Furthermore, Colombia is a crucial market in Latin America in terms of resources and the growth we have been achieving in the last three years alongside with the extensive product portfolio we have been bringing to the market.

Since 2009, you launched 11 new products that were expected to account for 50% of sales by 2017. How would you rate Janssen's performance in 2016?

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In 2016, Janssen has been achieving growth in all available therapeutic areas, mostly due to the new treatments brought to the market. However, we not only aim to achieve strong sales performance, but we are also looking to establish external reputation to be recognized as the most innovative company in Colombia. Last year we were recognized by Colciencias the number one innovative company and also received the recognition to be the highest ranked company promoting gender equality. Additionally, we are the number five company in the institutional market. Altogether, our practices and policies internally are very well directed and we are proud that the institutional market recognizes it.

Janssen is one of the world's leading pharma companies with its main mission to provide pharmaceutical products in five therapeutic areas: oncology, hematology, infectious disease, immunology and central nervous system. What are some of the most exciting products in pipeline?

Our product portfolio is extensive and continuously growing. Oncology is a very important area where we offer medicine for prostate cancer with expectations on launching the new solution in this specific area in the near future. Recently, we launched important products in the segment of hematology and chronic lymphocytic leukemia- both were approved as break-through innovations achieving impressive results in Colombia. In July, we launched a new medical product for multiple myeloma which will not only prolong the lifeline of many patients suffering from this disease but also give them an opportunity of better quality of life. Moreover, in the next few months we are launching a product in the central nervous system and schizophrenia area and we expect to hit the market with an immunology product by the end of next year.

What challenges is Janssen facing in Colombia?

Colombia is a specific market featuring a lot of opportunities, but also significant challenges. The main challenge currently is related to the topic of access- complex and lengthy process. Additionally, with the economy slowing down and some concerns arising about the sustainability of the system, we need to find new ways of addressing these challenges. Altogether, Colombian market has always been dealing with certain uncertainties and as a company we need to learn how to operate in this complex environment. Janssen has been present in Colombia for more than 30 years and we are committed to continue navigating in this transformative landscape as the company has continuously been devoted to improving the access of medicines for our patients.

What are the fundamental objectives you are looking to accomplish in the next three years?

Janssen's core value based on innovations truly motivates me to bring innovative solutions to Colombia. It is not only the philosophy behind the brand that matters, but also how you bring it and integrate it within daily operations. We still see that a lot of Colombian patients don't have access to medicines, and we want our Colombian affiliate to be among the ones that are assisting the stakeholders in resolving this issue. Every patient in Colombia is entitled to receive our products and therefore, one of my fundamental goals is directed towards tackling this challenge. Furthermore, we have very promising products in pipeline and a lot of upcoming launches that will continue driving the growth of the company. Following my own professional career, I am looking to assist many professionals in turning their dreams into reality. As previously mentioned, Colombia has a top talent pool that Janssen will continue to attract as we can truly make a difference in this country. Finally, giving people the opportunity of better quality of life and chance for the best treatment that will impact not only themselves but also their families and healthcare system overall- that is why we provide an excellent patient experience and innovation with sustainable healthcare costs.

Having built an extensive career and being an expert in the pharmaceutical industry, how do you see the Colombian pharma industry evolving in the upcoming years?

The healthcare system is moving towards the direction of appreciating the value that the drugs bring to the market- value based system evaluating the necessity of the drug. Additionally, innovation is crucial for advancing the healthcare system. Without innovation, any healthcare system would be in stagnation. In this regard, Janssen is well positioned as bringing transformational innovation to the market. Bringing innovative solutions to satisfy medical needs is the core philosophy of Janssen proven to be a very successful business strategy that we are looking forward to continue applying in the future.

What is the legacy you want to leave before moving to the next professional step?

The philosophy I am implementing into my job is directed towards acknowledging the best practices and bringing them to the market. I used to work in Spain for many years where I had a chance to acquire knowledge of the pharmaceutical industry; all of which can be applied in the Colombian market when adjusted to the specificities that the market features. I love my job and every step of the way I get the rewarding feeling for being able to work in such a noble industry devoted to saving people’s lives. Additionally, I care about our employees and my goal is to provide them with the best working conditions leading to their professional development and financial stability. I want to empower people and inspire them to collaborate and work towards achieving the common goal; patient’s health and quality of life- it’s all that matters at the end of the day.

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