Interview: Adriana Forero – General Manager, GSK Colombia



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Adriana Forero, General Manager of GSK Colombia, speaks about their efforts to remain at the forefront of the healthcare industry, while keeping their focus on increasing access, innovation and focus on the patient in order to become a strategic partner for the Government and the Colombian healthcare system

Ms. Forero, can you introduce yourself to our readers?

I have been working for GSK for 20 years, in many different positions. I started as a district manager, became then business unit manager and commercial director for seven years. Subsequently, I was appointed as general manager for Venezuela and held that position for two years. Finally, I went on to become general manager for the Colombian and Venezuelan operations two years ago, with an assigned mission to build up trust, create a great place to work, boost up the corporate social responsibility commitments and implementing new strategies to position GSK as the leading company in the sector.

What have been your main areas of focus and priorities since your appointment as head of GSK Colombia operations?

GSK worldwide has set the business model whose main focal point refers to increasing access, innovation and focus on the patient. Indeed, for five consecutive years we have been the leading company in the Access to Medicines Index and it is no different in Colombia. However, Colombia features a very specific and complex healthcare system characterized by a universal health coverage over 95 percent. In this regard, we must feel proud of our system and congratulate the authorities because they are doing a great job.

Consequently, GSK Colombia has been developing and implementing specific strategies to serve the government and key stakeholders in building the sustainable healthcare system in the long-term. For instance, we are integrating a strong pricing strategy into our business model, focused on reducing the prices of our products as this is part of our company DNA. This is also a response to the Health Ministry efforts and requests towards building up financial performance and sustainability for the system… For GSK, the definition of success refers to providing access to the medicine and adequate treatments for all the people who suffer from various diseases. The more people access to better healthcare, the healthier our nation will be.

We strongly believe that our people and their development is the path to achieve our goals, therefore one of our priorities is to promote employee leadership, skills and empowerment in an increasingly competitive environment.

What are some of the initiatives that you are implementing to provide more access and how specifically are you working with the government and other stakeholders?

In the last five years, we have been working to generate access to our portfolio and trying to integrate our services as part of the Expanded Program of Immunization in Colombia that operates under the Ministry of Health and Social Protection with the goal to making vaccines available and accessible countrywide. However, the sustainability of those programs is challenging as the economic burden is high. Therefore, GSK is making efforts to be of great assistance in this regard. Due to the large volumes that a market as Colombia demands, we have been working with the whole value chain to drive our prices down and be consistent with our pricing policy, access commitment and fulfilling patient needs. As an example, through our cooperation with PAHO, the price of our pneumococcal vaccine has been reduced by 20 percent during last five years.

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GSK’s product portfolio can be categorized in three lines: pharmaceutical medicine, vaccines and consumer healthcare. How is GSK’s product portfolio represented in Colombia and where do you observe the main growth drivers?

GSK is showcasing a very diversified product portfolio. Particularly in Colombia, we represent therapeutic lines of HIV, respiratory diseases and vaccines – all being significant topics of public interest. Additionally, we are proud to be market leaders in those segments. Currently, we are focusing on the development of our respiratory product portfolio as the prevalence of respiratory diseases in Colombia is high and most of our product launches come from this specific therapeutic line. As the new product development is part of the central global strategy, in the following 18 months we are introducing three new products in our respiratory line and the next year we also expect to hit the market with two new products for HIV, a category where we are also a market leader. We are determined to improve people’s wellbeing and their ability to live their life to the fullest.

In 2016, you were amongst the top 10 leading pharmaceutical company in Colombia, reaching 149 million USD in the first quarter of 2017. What reasons stand behind this exceptional result?

Our business strategy can be associated with developing the prevention or vaccination market, while making efforts on gaining the participation in both the private and institutional market. GSK prides itself in having the most complete vaccination portfolio, which is very significant in the market showcasing a lot of growth in the vaccine segment – we have vaccines for 21 of 31 diseases prevented by vaccines in the world. We also launched two innovative products in the HIV therapeutic line which drastically changed the quality of life of patients and the treatment adherence, which ultimately affects the market access and boosts the company’s growth. Even though our product portfolio is very innovative, we apply a rigorous pricing strategy to make them accessible to the entire population and at the same time surpass the competition including multinational and local companies. As we are looking to run the business in a cost-efficient manner, we are also introducing educational studies and analysis on the economic burden of certain diseases and the ways to prevent ailments to decrease the financial burden and improve the healthcare system.

Our efforts and achievements in this matter are the result of the proactive collaboration between our people and a wide network of public and private partners.

In 2015, GSK integrated Novartis' s vaccine line. What impact has it had on GSK's operations in Colombia?

For us, it was particularly stimulating as it provided us with an opportunity to complement our product portfolio. However, due to specific regulatory framework in Colombia, we adopted only one product. Nevertheless, it increased our growth, which is targeted to reaching 10 percent this year. The synergies will have a huge impact in the long-term perspective and they are already starting to gain traction.

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GSK is dedicated to corporate social responsibility, which is why you initiate a plethora of corporate social responsibility programs. Can you expand on the efforts made in this regard?

Behaving responsibly does not compromise commercial success, but enables it. By doing what business does best – in our case, developing medicines, vaccines and consumer healthcare products and improving access to them – we can deliver strong, sustainable performance and help improve the lives of people all over the world.

For example, this is the fifth year that we have been maintaining the strategic alliance with Save the Children in Colombia and worldwide, an international non-governmental organization promoting children's rights and providing healthcare support and saving children's lives in developing countries. We contribute through the promotion of local activities such as marathons, fundraising activities like bakery sales and other employee-led initiatives to raise money, which is afterwards doubled by the company. Secondly, we launched the Orange Day initiative, giving our employees one paid day off each year to volunteer for a good cause. It is a worldwide campaign to support a range of charities and projects including work in local schools, shelters for the homeless, community gardens, nursing homes and communities affected by natural disasters such as Mocoa.

How does GSK Colombia want to position itself in the innovative ecosystem of Colombia?

Our vision consists in being a leader in the industry, but also in providing access and making innovation available to the Colombian population. Indeed, innovation is one of our key drivers in the global corporate strategy that serves as a guidance in our path to becoming a partner of choice for all stakeholders in the ecosystem. In line with this, we are a company working in the long-term view to increase the access and work in a cost-efficient and innovative manner to bring products

that can impact the lives of people and improve the quality of life of patients.

You have been in charge of the company for two years, what are the current strategic priorities to further drive the growth of the affiliate?

We focus on several imperatives at the moment that includes pricing strategy to further increase access in Colombia as well as promoting transparency and generating trust within the Colombian landscape. As very few doctors in Colombia have an opportunity to attend national and international congresses, we are tapping into different digital channels to make information available to doctors in different geographical locations around the country. Additionally, we are dedicated to promote transparency and building trust amongst the industry while removing some of the grey areas in such topics as medicines prescription, medical seminars and congresses, scientific publications and information disclosure. This is why, GSK introduced a new engagement model that is also consistent with the governmental transparency law that relies on reinforcing internal medical team to grasp knowledge and expertise, while nurturing a new relations model preventing conflicts of interests and promoting for transparency in everything we do. Instead, we are providing accurate information that would allow doctors to prescribe the right medication to the right patients and also aligned to new digital habits.

On a more personal note, you have been working for GSK for 20 years. What keeps you motivated to continue bringing value to GSK?

GSK is a consistent company driven by its values and delivering the promised solutions. Ever since I joined the company, I have been experiencing the company’s focus on living the values, while being an ethical business with an exceptional work environment. We are one team, and I enjoy that every day. Additionally, I am proud to be part of a company dedicated to improving access rates and being actively involved in promoting initiatives to stay at the forefront of the healthcare industry worldwide. We are continuously reinforcing the company’s values by creating an exceptional working environment, while remaining at the forefront of innovation. Probably, that is why GSK was last year announced as the number one “company changing the world” by Fortune magazine, because it is a business focused on empowering people and enabling them to transform millions of lives. Having the possibility of being part of that, it makes me feel proud and motivates me and our team.

All over the world in the GSK operations you will be able to find stories like mine, hundreds of examples in which the company has bet on the development and success of their people as a strategic path to deliver our mission and reach our objectives.

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