Interview: Guillermo Browne – General Manager Colombia, MSD, Colombia



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18.09.2017

Tags: Colombia, MSD, Latin America, Pharma, Clinical Trials, R&D, Market Access, Healthcare

Guillermo Browne, General Manager at MSD Colombia, reveals the strategic importance of the Colombian affiliate, hosting a global data management centre and regional pharmacovigilance operations, while highlighting the company's commitment to continue advancing the therapeutic value of care and the clinical research landscape in Colombia.

With 70 years of presence in Colombia and as one of the most promising MSD affiliates in the region, what is the significance of the Colombian operations to the company?

The Colombian affiliate holds a strategic role within the region. We are the fourth country in Latin America in terms of sales behind Brazil, Mexico and Argentina, while being second to Brazil in the number of patients. MSD Colombia employs 740 people and is involved in 60 clinical trials across 120 centres in the country. We also have regional pharmacovigilance operations based in Colombia, while hosting one of the company's global data management centres. In fact, this centre was the first that was opened by MSD after the one in the USA. The rationale behind setting up these strategic centres in Colombia is the relative stability in the country, and an unmatched pool of talents with high levels of education and good English knowledge.

You were appointed general manager for MSD Colombia about a year ago. What have been your strategic priorities since?

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MSD Colombia’s priorities are very much aligned with the global strategy. Our major growth drivers rely in our focus areas, being oncology, vaccines, primary care including diabetes, and hospital acute care. We are also the absolute leaders in clinical research and wish to continue expanding in this regard. In addition, we own a promising pipeline for the years to come, in 2017 we launched multiple products, including a drug in the field of the immuno-oncology named Keytruda that is becoming one of the most promising molecules to treat cancer, we are proud to have brought to the market a vaccine named ProQuad in June, and expect to launch an antimicrobial product before the end of 2017.

Considering your wide portfolio, what are the opportunities you intend to use to fully maximise the affiliate’s performance?

Our main priority is to be included in the now called *Plan de Beneficios en Salud (PBS),* previously known as POS. Our teams are focusing on demonstrating therapeutic value, local knowledge, generating data and documenting the outcomes of our products. For example, our recently launched immuno-oncology drug is tied with a biomarker, meaning that the patients go through a test, and if the test is conclusive, the doctor will prescribe the product assuring that the treatment will personalized. This action increases the likelihood of success in the treatment and reassures the payer and the government that the product will be effective. It is evident that as new and better molecules are developed our medical teams and the medical research department become a strong pillar within our strategy. Furthermore, MSD focuses on strengthening its key account management to ensure that physicians and clients have a broader picture of the value that MSD brings.

MSD is listed as one of the top 10 companies in Colombia. What are the reasons for MSD’s success in the country?

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The key to success in the Colombian market is access. Some of our products, such as diabetes related treatments, are included in the public health national plan. Our growth has been mainly driven by the diabetes and vaccines portfolio, and to a lesser extent, acute care treatments. The vaccines success stems from our understanding of the government’s methods and specifically in the institutional market, most of the vaccines are sold through the Pan-American Health Organisation. We’ve registered these, when the Colombian government chose this method for national prevention campaigns. Additionally, we have promoted our mature brands through partnerships, such as with Eurofarma from Brazil and more recently since June with Bussié (Sanfer)

from Mexico. Last but not least, our clinical trials are strongly supported by hospitals. Our expansion there is constant, and we are willing to invest as much as we can in the country. I believe that the global clinical trials groups are doing a great job in making sure the patients have access to revolutionary and potentially life-saving treatments.

How do you envision the clinical trials landscape in Colombia moving forward?

The government's investment in the clinical trials area helps a lot and I firmly believe such investments are good news for Colombians. In turn, the Colombian market will be supplied with the most innovative molecules ensuring better quality of life for Colombian patients. I see great potential for MSD's further growth in this area; according to global ranking publications the clinical trials market in Colombia could reach USD 500 million in 5 years if the government demonstrates continuous support for innovation, however, there is still a lot to do in this regard.

What is your strategy to ensure the company's growth moving forward?

We try to beat our competition by being quicker in reading the market trends and seizing its opportunities, by partnering for success in the long run and by being innovative as a result of listening to the voice of the market. We base all this in the talent of our teams and our permanent and firm commitment to the highest ethical standards. We will continue to ensure that we are included in national formularies to transform the lives of patients, their families, and the of our employees. We have several strategies depending on the area of focus. In the case of diabetes, we aim to reach more patients. In fact, only 50 percent of the diabetics are diagnosed, and out of these, only 50 percent are being treated and only 30 percent of these are controlled. Long story short, I think there is a lot of room for improvement. Also, MSD is also focused on minimising future antimicrobials resistance, where we invest a lot in product development and education. Finally, prevention is of outmost importance. Any investment towards prevention is money well spent. I take great pride when thinking that 25 years from now, the onset of certain preventable diseases could be next to null thanks to the joint initiatives with the Colombian government.

You've spent 20 years of your career at MSD, working in different countries. What legacy do you want to leave before moving to the next professional step?

Our ambition is to improve the lives of the people living in Colombia. MSD is working hard to make this happen and it is a key to our success. One of our assets in this quest is the quality of MSD's products. Indeed, our products have gone through intensive clinical investigations, high quality controls and manufacturing. Additionally, we can rely on talented teams to make sure this continues. On the managerial side, I would like to install a winning mind-set amongst my people,

meaning I want to build strong competitive and collaborative teams. I’m confident in the capacities of our employees and I’ like to see them achieve all they’re capable of. People in the workplace should feel comfortable and motivated in order to contribute to MSD’s success in Colombia.

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