Jaime Vives – Managing Director, Roche Diagnostics Spain



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Jaime Vives, managing director of Roche Diagnostics in Spain, discusses the digital solutions Roche Diagnostics is trying to roll out in Spain, the challenges involved, and the potential implications of digitalising healthcare

Can you introduce yourself to our international audience and your key priorities?

I have been a general manager for Roche Diagnostics for almost 12 years. Prior to that, I spent 20 years working in different countries, including Germany and across Latin America. As the head of the region for Latin America, I was able to truly understand the region and the impact of our technologies on those markets. Our aim as a company is to bring these areas to the highest technological levels that Roche can offer.

Closer to home, here in Spain we suffered a severe crisis from 2010-12 when the market declined in terms of revenue, but not in terms of volume. Due to universal healthcare, we serve more patients every year, but with few financial resources. Today our main challenge is to help the market develop the next generation of digital solutions in healthcare.

What is performing best in Roche Diagnostics' Spanish portfolio?

We are active in what we call the central lab, and also in several other fields such as microbiology and genetics. We are focused on all of these areas, but automation, both in terms of software and hardware, has proved to be our most successful project. We are market leaders in terms of lab software.

What are you doing in terms of trying to roll out digitalization in Spanish healthcare?

The lab is perhaps one of the largest areas in terms of collecting and producing data. This data is interpreted by the clinician. The clinician is supposed to understand this data and act upon it. However, the field of diagnostics is increasing in complexity. As we introduce molecular diagnostics using genomics, it has become more difficult for clinicians to understand what they are reading, let alone act upon it. For example, genomic data requires bioinformatics and AI to structure a report into a concise and cogent form. Otherwise, it is unintelligible. The goal of digitalization is to bring systems that can interpret this kind of data, simplifying it so that clinicians can act upon it efficiently.

What are the main challenges for bringing digitalization to Spain?

Using big data firstly requires it to be collected, and to be standardised into a particular form. One of the main problems we have in Spain is that every single hospital produces their own data in their own way. The first step into digitalization is to convince our customers to standardise their systems and the way that they collect data. Without this, we cannot progress. Once this has been implemented, we can create algorithms and software to mine this data and offer clinical support.

In terms of working with stakeholders to encourage standardisation, we take a community by community approach. However, even within the community this is difficult because we’re not just talking about possible information systems, but also lab information systems too. Thus, we need to convince the regional governments of the merits in standardising their systems. In some communities, such as the Basque Country and Andalusia, there have been positive steps, with all of the public hospitals adopting the same software. Other communities, however, still lag behind.

There is also the element where those responsible for the IT in hospitals are hesitant to open up their systems to private companies, fearing both a conflict of interest and a risk of being exposed to hacking or data breach. We have to make them aware that working in the cloud is safe, but often they prefer using their own servers. While this will take time, I see a rising awareness of the

necessity of digitalization and thus believe we are on the right path. Due to the lack of trust in the private sector managing public data, digitalization often requires individual visionaries in the hospital to champion the cause and implement the solutions. We also find that lobbying the authorities for these changes is coming from the physicians themselves, understanding the potential it could bring to patients. We have to be very transparent and open with how we will use this data, adhering to the strictest data protection laws to build that trust amongst our partners in the industry. We also invest heavily in gaining the relevant accreditations to demonstrate our seriousness towards data protection

How prepared is Spain to embrace digitalization in healthcare?

Spain is very well prepared to adopt these new digital solutions, and in the field of digitalization, is quite advanced. In several regions, including in Catalonia, we have a wide range of companies that are experts in software development. We also have our own software development centre here in Catalonia that develops bespoke software for the customer, as well as a centre dealing with internal IT for Roche and is based in Madrid. Thanks to the quality of the universities and the employees in the Barcelona area, this allows us to be a centre of excellence in digitalization for Roche Diagnostics.

What do you see as the impact of digital solutions on healthcare?

The first aspect is cost savings. This is something that is becoming salient in European markets with stretched healthcare budgets. Cost savings through digitalization will help to ensure the sustainability of the systems, particularly when faced with a growing chronic disease burden and an ageing population.

Our vision is for proper diagnostics to become a preventative measure. The most expensive aspect of the health care system is the hospital. Consequently, keeping people out of the hospital through preventative diagnostics could bring huge savings. An example of this could be the measurements and monitoring of chronic diseases at home rather than as an inpatient process.

Moreover, proper diagnostics procedures could mean that expertise and specialism were not limited to hospitals in major centre such as Madrid or Barcelona but can be brought to the patient regardless of geography, using digitalization. This is what we call a democracy of healthcare, allowing everyone access to the best specialists, without relying on a lottery of where you live. As a

result, the specialist can go to the patient rather than the reverse.

What is the importance of Spain for Roche Diagnostics?

Spain has always been an innovative affiliate. That is why we have a centre of excellence in IT based here. We continue to be one of the most advanced affiliates in terms of digitalization. We always strive to ensure that Spain is a pioneer for innovation.

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