# Sergio Teixeira – Managing Director, Biogen Spain



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*Biogen's managing director for Spain, Sergio Teixeira, reflects on the company's key role in transforming multiple sclerosis and spinal muscular atrophy as examples of the American biotech giant commitment to transforming neuroscience. The Portuguese executive also analyzes what he describes as a "positive" momentum for biosimilars in Spain amongst his own career highlights and the major lessons learnt along the way.*

**Can you start by commenting on your career in the life sciences industry and how you ended up managing Biogen's Spain affiliate?**

I love life sciences; it has always been my passion. I studied pharmacy which makes a lot of sense when looking to work in the pharmaceutical industry because the overall objective of both disciplines is to change lives. In order to do it, we need to understand what is happening in living organisms, understanding the impact of diseases on human beings and how treatments can transform the quality of life of patients and caregivers.

My career in the pharma industry, now more than 20 years long, began in Portugal with a German company. After a short period, I moved to Amgen where I complimented my work with an MBA. With new learnings and having developed important skills such as marketing and business administration, I was invited to go back with the German company which allowed me the opportunity to perform an international role as European product manager based in Berlin. After a

couple of years, I moved back to Portugal where, in 2008, Biogen offered me the country manager role.

Finally, after more than 7 years in the position, I was named managing director for Spain and moved to Madrid. Biogen had been a great match for my real motivation, which is changing lives, both externally and inside the organization; we must have a positive impact in the world. This organization is one of the most important biotech companies in the world because of the problems it is working to address.

**With over USD 10 billion in annual revenue, Biogen is indeed a central player in the biotechnology industry. Can you briefly walk us through the particular story of the organization as you understand it and what the underlining objective is?**

Founded in 1978 by prominent biologists, two of whom went on to receive the Nobel prize, Biogen has more than four decades of dedication to neuroscience; it is the oldest independent biotech company in the world. Initially, the company focused solely on multiple sclerosis (MS) and, together with other organizations, completely transformed the disease thanks to a pioneering spirit.

After achieving great success, Biogen expanded into spinal muscular atrophy (SMA), a rare neurological disease. Nowadays, we are working and investing in other crucial areas such as Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s. Why do we believe this is important? Because neurosciences are the next frontier of scientific progress and Biogen is uniquely positioned to address the most challenging healthcare needs. The company knows that there are urgent unmet medical needs in this area and is looking to replicate its transformation of MS and SMA in other therapeutic areas.

**The launch of Biogen’s spinal muscular atrophy product coincided with your arrival in Spain as managing director in 2016. What were the key lessons when launching the product?**

It is a very relevant question because SMA was our first incursion into rare diseases – today we also are developing solutions for amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) patients, among other diseases.

In Spain, fortunately, our organization managed to collaborate efficiently with the Ministry of Health, patient associations, healthcare professionals (HCPs) and other relevant stakeholders to obtain rapid reimbursement. This was possible, of course, because there were no available

treatments for SMA at that time. Biogen brought to the country a therapy with strong clinical results that in part were performed in Spain. The launch could be considered as an example of how authorities across the country can and will rise to the challenge; at the end of the day, we all want patients to be treated with the right solution at the right time.

**Speaking about rising to challenges, its efforts in Alzheimer's disease have put Biogen in the spotlight. While some argue it is a delicate topic, it is also a great opportunity for the company to communicate with the public about a devastating disease. Most recently, Biogen published a statement about its commitment to provide access to aducanumab to patients outside the US through different access pathways. What can you tell us about the situation in Spain?**

The Alzheimer's disease topic is important because it affects the lives of a substantial portion of the population. In Spain, according to the Spanish Neurology Society, it is estimated that more than 800,000 people have been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, which has a strong impact on them and their families, who in Spain mostly assume the task of care. But it impacts everyone around them, from HCPs to family and friends. The disease is an important social issue that requires everyone to come together in search of a solution.

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Yes, Biogen has requested a re-examination of the CHMP opinion. As part of the re-examination process, we will seek to address the CHMP's grounds for refusal, with the goal of making this medicine available in the European Union. European patients deserve access to innovative treatments for Alzheimer's disease.

**Biogen has several biosimilars available in the Spanish market. Can you comment on the biosimilars landscape in the country, which lags other European countries in access levels?**

In Spain, the situation of biosimilars adoption has improved in recent years, although there is still some way to go to catch up with other neighboring countries, like Nordic countries or the United Kingdom. Today, the market share of biosimilars is not spectacular but it has grown month after month, year after year. In Biogen's case, 240,000 people in Europe have received anti-TNF

biosimilar treatments in the first half of this year, in the therapeutic areas of rheumatology, gastroenterology and dermatology.

This has led to an estimated savings of €2.4 billion for European healthcare systems, which is incredible. But above all it allows these patients to have access to these innovative therapies, early on, so that their quality of life is improved.

In this sense, I wish to highlight the great job being done by BioSim (the Spanish Biosimilar Medicines Association) and the Spanish Ministry of Health since they have been working for a new national biosimilars plan. We believe that the plan will definitively help patients and the healthcare system

As an innovative biotechnology company, Biogen understands that innovation comes at a high cost, which is why we want biosimilars to succeed; it would contribute to the sustainability of the healthcare system by creating important savings that could then be invested in better and faster innovation.

**How do you convey Biogen’s commitment to Spain when speaking with stakeholders in the country? What sort of footprint does the company have?**

Today Biogen has more than 140 employees distributed in several areas across Spain. Since the company believes that research and development (R&D) is key to fulfilling its mission, it has over 35 ongoing clinical trials in the country, involving 74 centers, 240 researchers and 1,800 patients.

This is possible thanks to the commitment and cross functional work of the Spanish members of the affiliate, we are proud to count on so talented team. I would also like to highlight that there are some key regional roles being performed from Spain, people who work on European affairs for Biogen; our affiliate is a Talent Hub for the company around the world. This is another way in which the company invests in Spain, offering international professional development to talented people.

As I mentioned at the beginning, my passion is to change lives and we at Biogen have been fortunate enough to offer talent a unique chance to develop their lives and careers. As an example, we’ve been recognized for the second time as a Top Employer in 2022. It means a lot because our most important asset is people; having the right people can make a huge difference in the ability of the company to save and transform the lives of patients and caregivers. This is the second time in a row that Biogen Spain has earned the distinction, and only the second time it has applied so our success rate is 100 percent.

We are committed to including a diverse group of talented individuals, making sure to listen to their perspectives. We want to continue to grow as the reference company in neuroscience and in the pharmaceutical industry in general.

One example of how we support young talent is our annual BioRace program, a project that offers young individuals a chance to join the organization and experience the real work being done by pharmaceutical professionals. What differentiates our program is that incoming talent works side by side with Biogen professionals, staying with them throughout their daily activities. For example, they can accompany our medical team to visits with HCPs so they can see what the real job looks like. Learning something in a classroom is very helpful but seeing it in action will make a difference in your development.

**As a 20+ years veteran of the industry, what advice would you give young people looking to follow your career path?**

I believe that you will do things right if you like what you do. It sounds simple, but it’s profoundly accurate. What worked for me was following my passion and love for biotechnology; having a company that allowed me to dedicate my energy to that was great. Another element that I hold in high regard was the chance to have international experience. You can see and read about the differences between places, people, cultures, climate, and food, but working there will allow you to take the best of the place and introduce it to your next destination. The key part of working in pharmaceutical companies is having the right manager to learn from and opportunities to develop.

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