Juan Vera Prieto, General Manager – Organon Spain & Portugal



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Organon's general manager for Spain and Portugal, Juan Vera, explains the challenges of executing the spinoff from MSD in the middle of the pandemic, the reasons why his affiliate has become the largest in Europe by revenue and the fourth globally after the US, China and Japan. In addition, Vera walks us through the strategy to put women's health at the top of the agenda by advocating for "Health with Perspective."

Before commenting on the affiliate and the challenge of executing the spinoff in the middle of a global pandemic, can you start by commenting on how we should interpret the fact that a man is leading a women's health company? Is it a relevant fact?

Organon was born with diversity at its core, something that is key for us especially in today's complex society; we believe that companies should reflect the society they serve. Diversity, which Organon holds in high esteem, does include a sex component, a balance between men and women. Of the company's total employees, 62 percent are women, a balance also reflected in leadership roles; no other company in the Fortune 500 has more women on the board of directors.

The fact that I am a man is not relevant if we think about our objective of achieving equal access to the healthcare system, where specific needs of each patient are addressed regardless of gender. This should be a goal for the entire society, not only women.

Moving to your involvement with the company, can you take us through the spinoff process and where the Spain and Portugal affiliate is today?

At the country level, we started working on the new Organon project in early 2020. The official separation from MSD came in June of the following year. I believe that starting the company at such an uncertain moment ended up helping us because it gave the organization a fresh start, the opportunity to decide how it would operate. Organon took a portfolio of more than 60 products, 9,000+ employees and over USD 6 billion in revenue; it is a large and complex organization that must work with the same quality standards as our previous company. Not having an office at the time and without many employees having direct channels of communication with clients was challenging, but we managed to create our own culture.

Organon Spain is the largest European affiliate of the group and the fourth worldwide behind the United States, China and Japan. I am responsible of Spain and Portugal.

Although we started with reproductive health as our base, we strongly believe that women's health goes way beyond reproductive health. Another key area for the company is oncology where we have two biosimilars in the Spanish market; this area allows for a different dialogue with the authorities because they understand that Organon is an innovative company that can help the system become more sustainable.

Finally, we have a comprehensive portfolio that covers cardiology – which is the main cause of death for women –, respiratory, pain, CNS and dermatology. Those are original products that in many cases have lost patent protection but remain heavily trusted by prescribers.

Why is Spain such an important market for Organon? Does it have to do with the fact that women in the country hold such great social and political power?

In addition to the size of the country, fortunately, Organon enjoys great name recognition from all stakeholders in Spain. What we do know is that Organon has come to address crucial needs in women's health, we call it "Salud con Perspectiva" (Health with Perspective).

How is the company looking to meet those unmet needs of women? First, through investment in pathologies that affect women such as endometriosis – which affects 1 in 10 women, is a cause of infertility and has no approved long-term treatment options –, polycystic ovary or fibromyalgia. Second, by helping the healthcare system respond adequately to the different needs of men and women, something that has been limited historically due to the lack of involvement of women in

clinical studies. The reality is that women and men have different genes, chromosomes, hormones and metabolism; it has been proven that symptoms and disease progression are not the same, which translates into different treatments. Many immunologic diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis usually start with pain which, in the case of women, has a higher possibility to be misdiagnosed as psychological, leading to a gap in diagnosis. Our challenge is to spread scientific knowledge to healthcare professionals, universities, authorities and the general population.

How challenging is it to educate an entire system about the differences of men and women with limited resources?

The challenge is so big that Organon cannot do it alone. For that reason, we have focused on building that ecosystem, looking for scientific societies, regional governments, doctors and researchers that are interested in expanding the scope of their work. Fortunately, there are many voices advocating for this. Another important setting are pharmacies, taking into account that 75% of pharmacists are women.

What can you tell us about trends driving the future of the Spanish healthcare system?

The Spanish healthcare system has in recent years understood that change is necessary. There are some indicators that seem worrisome such as access to innovative treatments compared to other European countries. On that front, we must secure access to innovation, but we must do it in a sustainable way, which could be addressed with new mechanisms to evaluate and finance medicines. The move to include real world evidence in such evaluations is a positive development in our opinion; however, the system, as it is today, is not capable of moving in that direction because of limited digitalisation.

Organon is a credible advocate for this because the company is offering innovation and cost-effective treatments such as biosimilars and established medicines at the same time.

The Spanish healthcare system is known for its decentralisation, but what can you tell us about the differences between the regions?

In Spain, decisions regarding price and reimbursement are taken at a national level, with increasing input from the different regions, but the budget is in the hands of the autonomous

communities. Since each region makes its own decisions, you can find some that focus on the value of treatments for patients and others that have fixated on price. In addition, there are differences in the way healthcare professionals follow the guidelines provided by the regions, making it necessary for companies to have more than one strategy. Spain is a more complex system than centralised ones such as France.

What about Portugal, the other country covered by the affiliate you lead?

Portugal, given its smaller size, is more centralised. While Spain has many big hospitals spread across the territory, Portugal's system revolves around a few hospitals. Portugal has made a big effort to be innovative and has a more stable political landscape. In fact, Organon recently announced that it would build its Global Shared Services Center (GSS) for Europe in Lisbon which will make our company the largest pharma employer in the country.

As you described earlier, Organon is well known by healthcare practitioners and patients. But what about talent, seeing as MSD might be more well known than Organon?

In my view, Organon is a very attractive organisation for talent, regardless of gender and age, because of its purpose, which is to create a better and healthier every day for every woman, and the way in which we intend to work. Creating a diverse team is a priority, but also becoming an efficient organisation that can translate work into tangible benefits for patients. We are not as large as our previous company in number of employees, but we did get about sixty percent of the portfolio.

Can you share a few examples of how Organon Spain is working to share its "Health with Perspective" message?

A good reflection of the company's bet on women's health is the fact that it decided to make March 8, 22– International Women's Day – a holiday for employees, providing paid time off this year for all employees across the globe to attend to their own health needs. Moreover, we have been sharing the Health with Perspective message through different channels such as digital radio or experts forums for both scientific and social researchers, as well as working with scientific societies for specific diseases.

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