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LatAm



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Guilherme Marques, president of Siemens Healthineers LatAm, discusses the health tech giant's regional strategy, covering how the firm rides out the region's economic and political storms, its participation in disease screening campaigns, digitalisation uptake, oncology integration, and much more.

How did you get started in this industry?

I studied electrical engineering at a university in the south of Brazil. However, I like to learn and understand different perspectives, therefore I also studied business administration and psychology...not the usual combination.

Siemens is a very attractive company for any engineer. I applied for a job and started working here in 1999 with responsibility for the introduction of a new telecommunications portfolio, at a time when telecommunications were booming and there were already some regulations that expanded the access for this area. It was a great opportunity that allowed me to be in an incubator with Siemens and this new technology.

In 2004, I started to dip my toes into the healthcare market as my father was a doctor and we always wanted to take up the challenge of combining my engineering mindset with medical

knowledge to transform things. My job was related to a new type of service not only for Siemens but all companies under Siemens, which soon evolved – due to my engineering background – to me taking over the digital solutions for the imaging department.

After a few years, in 2007 I was invited to be part of a small group to aid in the integration process of the imaging operations of Bayer and DPC ...it was about finding synergies between imaging and in vitro diagnostics and digitalising them both on a combined platform.

A year later, I left the company and started at Carestream where I focused on the digital ecosystem, learning first from a German company and then from a North American one, it was quite the challenge.

After three years, I returned to Siemens because it was my home; I like its culture, ethics and strategy. This time I was only responsible for a small part of the imaging equipment like ultrasound and X-ray products. In 2015, I took over the whole imaging area and broadened the focus from Brazil to the whole of LatAm. 2019 granted me the opportunity to learn different things, such as laboratory diagnostics. As of now, I am responsible for the whole of Latin America and it is a great challenge for a young leader like me to be given this opportunity by this great company.

Was it a smooth transition getting into the healthcare field coming from a solely engineering company? How have you experienced this change within Siemens?

We were and have been in this transition for quite some time, starting with the idea to have an IPO. The main thing is that we have a purpose beyond the business aspect of it all, both as a company and for me personally as well. It is not only about crunching numbers and pushing products, it is about taking care of *all* stakeholders...the customers, patients and investors included. This gives us a much broader view of things and allows us to position ourselves in the market in a way that we can offer more integrated solutions and use sell technologies and their benefits. This changes how we work and even how we live.

What is the importance and relevance of LatAm in Siemens' strategy?

We merged the entire region from Mexico all the way to Argentina. this empowered us and brought a very diverse set of countries together, which translated to many opportunities to impact the region. The new cultures we were confronted with and our new journey with Siemens Healthineers

somehow matched perfectly, because this so-called new work culture is all about new challenges and being open to change.... we wanted to try new things out and that is a reason why LatAm was a region full of possibility.

Another aspect is resilience and despite the uncertainty of these markets – due to inflation, political issues or even social ones – these challenges are what make us stronger and perform better. We have pushed ourselves and hit the targets we have set, even outgrowing our own goals and expectations, proving that different or difficult is still possible, you just need to think outside of the box to make an impact.

We are currently on a very special cusp, as we have been asked to take on more responsibility in other areas that have not been associated with engineering for the longest time; our work has been seen and acknowledged, but then to be part of the few doing that in the region is very rewarding. Lastly, the best reason of them all is being able to grant or help with access to care in this region with a lot of people in need of it; which we will achieve as we plan to take all the opportunities given to us. We plan to have an open mindset internally but also with our new customers and I am sure we can improve how we work and bring many innovative projects online.

Which are the drivers that translate to great performance given the serious geopolitical and economic challenges the world - including LatAm - is facing today?

I would say that we are more resilient having faced challenges head-on instead of focusing on all the negative outcomes. It is a mindset that says if you accomplish this, you can accomplish anything... what else does one need for motivation? We are very diligent in tracking progress and delivering on our targets, by providing access to more people, with no excuses. This sense of purpose and urgency is what drives us every day and makes us feel like we are part of something that has a good impact on the world.

Let us not forget that inflation is a global problem now and not particular to this region anymore, evidently it impacts every region differently; but now we know we can face it and how to accomplish it. So overall innovation is key, you have to be creative in order to hit targets and get things done in the complex and diverse world we live in. That plus strong leadership gets the job done, meaning that some innovations that came out of the region are now global solutions used in other countries.

Is health a priority for the governments in the region? Does this dynamic coupled with the issue of affordability influence the selection of products that Siemens Healthineers brings to LatAm from its portfolio?

Healthcare is important for all governments and investment in healthcare is acknowledged as necessary everywhere. All governments take different decisions as they see fit, but all are trying to better healthcare in one way or another and reach more people in the process. Markets within LatAm are very different from one to another, for example, Brazil has more participation in the public market in comparison to Mexico which leans more towards the private market regarding healthcare. There are different profiles, and we learn not just to adapt but also to adjust ourselves and position our solutions in another matter, as one solution does not fit all needs and environments.

Affordability is always on the agenda, but it is my point of view that one should measure the benefit of the solution and its costs; the bigger issue is that the market is very fragmented, meaning we have diverse interests and converging them is not easy, especially when we are used to spending more on therapies and less on prevention. Therefore, achieving this balance is extremely difficult, because taking a step back to see the bigger picture, really analysing where the funds have the biggest impact, is not a common practice and takes a lot of communication and planning to achieve. It is better and less costly to prevent or make an early diagnosis than to bring a sick person back to health.

Is Siemens Healthineers currently participating in any disease screening campaigns in LatAm?

There are many programs, for example, on the topic of breast cancer there are campaigns but they are not well-synchronised or connected so that the screening is seen as a benefit for the patients. In the case of diabetes, we are part of a lot of screening programs, as we believe prevention is fundamental to avoid the waste of money.

We just need to better connect the dots, not only invest in prevention but really convey that we can reduce death – and costs – through the early diagnosis of any pathology. For example, we can reduce the risk of breast cancer patients by 70 percent at the beginning of the disease. We need to have a better flow and stronger storytelling for campaigns to have the impact we desire. In addition to a better flow, we need to give these campaigns continuity, in the sense, it has to be available country-wide and not limited to a city.

In terms of digitalisation, how advanced is LatAm? Is it a matter that has been left up to providers like Siemens Healthineers to capture this data and share it?

It is complex, as in some countries the data belongs to the patients and they do not want it to be shared, but overall there is still a lot of information stored on paper. Evidently, there is not much we can do in such cases, but there are some instances where data is available and we take advantage of it. For example, we have an abdomen MRI where we find something unexpected that was not the initial focus of the test and based on such findings generate data that could possibly establish a connection to the problem.

A more tangible example would perhaps be the COVID pandemic, where we were working mainly in Brazil with some customers and collected data from over 50,000 images of thoraxes and from that programmed a type of algorithm that helped radiologists grasp the potential severity of COVID. In this case, there is a lot of artificial intelligence (AI) involved and it is a clear example that there is data we can use and provide big solutions. We are focusing on oncology and cardiovascular disease because we think those are areas we could provide great solutions.

Siemens Healthineers recently strengthened its positioning in oncology with the acquisition of Varian; how is the company's oncology footprint progressing in LatAm?

The company is strengthening its position in oncology because we can see the tumour markers in the diagnostics lab or through a CT on the imaging area; after the patient has a minimally invasive surgery and some advanced therapies or platforms that can aid, like ultrasounds or radiotherapy...this is one of the solutions available.

We are pushing hard to combine and integrate teams, in the sense that we are trying to find synergies internally that can offer the population what they need. The aim is to find a protagonist that will provide more access to care for those who need it and combine forces with them to reach a solution. That is what we strive for and are trying to achieve with our programs.

Our purpose is to innovate in healthcare for everyone, everywhere, which is the reason why we want to combine efforts with others to achieve it and not just take over a different company and its portfolio, as we cannot do it all effectively...collaboration is needed. We would love to find a solution that allows someone who potentially has cancer to be diagnosed and have access to therapy immediately after the discovery, not having to wait weeks for a solution and avoiding any

other issues with the organ in question. Evidently, we envision this for lighter therapies and not chemotherapy, as it is more complex and has many collateral issues.

What is the future of radiology in LatAm?

There are a lot of investment opportunities in screening programs and radiotherapy as well. There are more coordination and cooperation efforts made by the private and public sectors, thus great things can be accomplished. For this reason, you can find access to great therapies in the region.

Physicians are open and willing to learn new technologies, if we take radiologists as an example, when we started to incorporate AI into our solutions at first they were worried that their jobs were on the line; but quickly they realised it was an aid that made more productive and were on board. They especially appreciated that the machine helped with the report, therefore they have more time to focus on the patient and potential issues that might arise. In the end, everybody wins.

What is the future like for healthcare in Latin America and how can some of the new risks associated with new governments and financial issues be mitigated?

This last year Brazil and Colombia had elections and things are changing constantly. However, we do not expect the healthcare situation to change dramatically; access gaps persist regardless of politics so we continue to concentrate on bridging those gaps and expanding access. Technologies are key to making this happen. As an example, we have what we call the syngo Virtual Cockpit (sVC), a software for remote scanning assistance that can connect three medical representatives in different places who can operate the magnetic resonance remotely. This technology helps us reach more places, serving more patients but also having specialists available for consultation in areas where this knowledge or pathology is not accessible. We need to position these types of solutions better and really share their benefits as it is an added value to the patients.

Do you want to share anything else about Siemens Healthineers in LatAm?

I want to make Siemens Healthineers here in Latin America the best place to work and I want us to be key for any tech health solutions for this region. Overall, this is a great company to work at and to work with, and we truly make a positive impact.

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