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Mexico has all the ingredients necessary to become a global hub for clinical trials—a large population of over 130 million, strong infrastructure, and a highly capable medical community

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Jorge Luis Caridad, managing director of Johnson & Johnson Innovative Medicine, Mexico, explores his 18-year journey within the company, emphasizing his alignment with J&J's values and its mission to transform global health. Caridad discusses the challenges and opportunities presented by the Mexican market, the company's commitment to advancing innovation in the country and to performing clinical trials there, and its collaboration with the Mexican government particularly around digitalization and clinical trials.

How has your career within Johnson & Johnson evolved, particularly through your transitions across different regions and roles?

My 18-year journey within Johnson & Johnson has been both extensive and enriching, marked by a series of transitions across various regions and roles that have shaped my leadership and strategic outlook. I began my career in the EMEA region, spending a decade at Johnson & Johnson in Spain. This period served as a critical foundation, where I gained deep insights into different therapeutic areas and managed a wide array of responsibilities, from sales and marketing to market access and patient support programs. My experience also spanned business analytics, customer insights, and innovative approaches like 'PHYGITAL'—a blend of physical and digital strategies. This diverse exposure allowed me to develop a robust skill set and learn from some of the most inspiring

leaders within the company.

Following my time in EMEA, I transitioned to Latin America, where I took on the role of commercial director for the Northern cluster leading the commercial operations in Colombia, Peru and Ecuador, after 4 years learning from different health systems I assumed the challenge of evolving the access capabilities in the Central American and Caribbean cluster as market access director focusing on our portfolio of innovative medicines, a journey that prepare me to assume the next role as managing director for the Southern Cone cluster, which includes Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Bolivia. This was a significant step in my career, as it involved navigating complex challenges such as portfolio transformation and deep business restructuring. The focus was not only on driving growth but also on fostering a strong organizational culture, developing talent, and ensuring sustainable success in the region. The experience in the South Cone was transformative, both for the business and for me personally.

Currently, I am leading operations in Mexico as managing director, a role I have held for the past eight months. Unlike my previous cluster responsibilities, this position is concentrated entirely on the pharmaceutical sector within a single country. Despite the relatively short time, we have made remarkable strides in accelerating innovation, with a focused effort on impacting over 24,000 patients dealing with critical conditions. Our work in Mexico is driven by a commitment to advance healthcare solutions and make a meaningful difference in the lives of patients.

What were your initial assessments and primary priorities upon arriving in Mexico?

When I first arrived in Mexico, I saw a country brimming with opportunities, particularly within its healthcare sector. However, one of the most striking observations was the relatively low investment in healthcare—Mexico allocates only 2.5 percent of its GDP to this sector, one of the lowest figures globally. This underscored a significant opportunity to engage with government officials and advocate for a more robust investment in the health system as a whole.

In addition to this, we identified a critical need to expedite the introduction of innovative medical treatments in Mexico. Compared to other Latin American countries, Mexico has opportunities in terms of regulatory approval and access timelines. A notable W.A.I.T. study made by IQVIA and sponsored by FIFARMA highlighted these challenges, showing that Mexico presents substantial opportunities to streamline these processes.

Rather than viewing these challenges as insurmountable, we saw them as opportunities where Johnson & Johnson could make a profound impact. Despite being in this role for only eight months, we have already made significant progress in accelerating access to our innovations, especially in therapeutic areas with the most urgent medical needs—such as lung cancer, prostate cancer, multiple myeloma, and B-cell malignancies including multiple myeloma, lymphoma and leukaemia. We have achieved remarkable reductions in approval and access times, setting new benchmarks in the process.

The success we have seen stems from a strong internal alignment and a collaborative approach within Johnson & Johnson. Every function—whether commercial, sales, market access, medical affairs, or business support—is united by a common goal: to transform as many lives as possible. This shared sense of urgency drives us to deliver more, better, and faster in therapeutic areas where the need is greatest, all through our unwavering commitment to innovation.

What is Johnson & Johnson’s primary focus in Mexico, and how do you translate business objectives into meaningful patient outcomes?

Our primary focus in Mexico extends far beyond mere business objectives; it centres on the profound impact we can make on patients’ lives. We consistently translate our business goals into tangible results—measured by the number of lives we transform. This patient-centric approach drives our entire organization, inspiring us to view our roles not just as jobs, but as contributions to a larger mission: to combine heart, science and ingenuity in a way that genuinely changes lives.

Which therapeutic areas are you prioritizing in Mexico, and how is Johnson & Johnson driving innovation in these fields?

Johnson & Johnson is committed to advancing healthcare across multiple critical therapeutic areas in Mexico, each characterized by ground-breaking innovation. We are making a big difference in lung cancer, providing new hope to those patients with specific genetic mutations, and looking forward to keep expanding our portfolio in this disease. In the realm of prostate cancer and multiple myeloma, we are redefining treatment standards through precision medicine in solid tumours and immunotherapy in hematologic malignancies. In the case of multiple myeloma, we aim not only to extend patients’ lives but are also pushing us closer to what was once unimaginable: the potential to cure this life-threatening disease.

Our commitment extends to immune-mediated diseases like psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis where we are bringing cutting-edge pharmaceutical innovations and expanding indications to address significant unmet needs in inflammatory bowel diseases, such as Crohn’s disease and ulcerative colitis. Beyond this, our work in pulmonary hypertension, where we offer comprehensive treatment options across all stages, and HIV, with therapies to demonstrate our dedication to keep addressing some of the most pressing health challenges with innovative solutions.

How is Johnson & Johnson perceived within the medical community, and how do you advocate for the value of medical innovation to government officials?

Johnson & Johnson is widely recognized in the medical community for our relentless pursuit of innovation that transforms lives. This reputation extends to our interactions with government officials, where we emphasize the critical value of medical innovation not just for patient outcomes, but for the sustainability of the healthcare system as a whole. We often draw parallels to consumer behaviour towards innovation —just as people recognize the value and would choose a modern smartphone over an outdated one willing to afford the cost of that innovation, the same logic should apply to healthcare innovations. The value of innovation in medicine is undeniable; it is essential for ensuring that healthcare systems remain effective and sustainable. At Johnson & Johnson, we are committed to ensuring that this message resonates, advocating for a perspective that places health and innovation at the forefront of societal priorities.

Why do you think medical innovation may not be fully embraced in some countries, particularly in Mexico?

The perception of medical innovation varies widely across countries. In some nations, innovation is highly valued and integrated into their core strategies. However, countries like Mexico face significant challenges in this area, largely due to underinvestment in healthcare. With only 2.5 percent of the GDP allocated to health, Mexico struggles with reimbursement issues and lacks the financial capacity to provide cutting-edge treatments to all who need them. This situation calls for a shift in mindset—viewing healthcare spending not as an expenditure but as a critical investment. A healthy society is a productive one, and investing in health is not just sustainable but essential for national progress.

To fully leverage innovation, it is crucial to transition from a short-term focus on costs to a more strategic, sustainable investment approach. Investing in innovation today not only addresses current health challenges but also mitigates future, potentially more costly issues.

How can countries better leverage innovation, and what examples from other nations could Mexico follow?

A key issue in many countries, including Mexico, is a lack of deep understanding of the true value of innovation. At Johnson & Johnson, we are committed to advocating for this understanding, both within our organization and through our work with industry chambers. We emphasize that innovation has a profound impact not just on patients, but also on healthcare professionals and the broader economy and society.

Some countries have successfully leveraged innovation by embracing clinical trials as a strategic approach. For example, Argentina has looked to Spain, which once faced similar challenges. Spain recognized that investing in clinical trials was a smart way to introduce innovation early, supported by companies, and to offer new therapeutic options to patients who had exhausted other alternatives. This approach also fosters an “economy of knowledge,” where healthcare professionals gain early exposure to innovative treatments, enhancing their expertise and benefiting the entire healthcare ecosystem.

In countries like Argentina and Brazil, this strategy is gaining traction, with significant private investment in R&D coming from pharmaceutical companies through clinical trials. In Argentina, 45 percent of all private R&D investment now comes from the pharmaceutical industry. This influx of resources is transforming healthcare infrastructure, improving treatment methodologies, and building capabilities that might otherwise be overlooked by the government. The positive ripple effects of such investments are immense—benefiting patients, healthcare professionals, and the economy at large.

At Johnson & Johnson, we are dedicated to shifting mindsets and advocating for a more strategic view of innovation. We believe that timely recognition and reimbursement of innovative treatments are essential not only for generating resources but also for sustaining and advancing healthcare systems overall.

How is Johnson & Johnson engaging in clinical trials in Mexico, and how has this area evolved over time?

Johnson & Johnson has a long-standing commitment to clinical trials in Mexico, supported by our Global Clinical Operations (GCO) branch, which has been active in the country for many years. Over the past decade, our involvement in clinical trials has grown significantly, with increasing investments year after year. In 2023 alone, we conducted 36 different clinical trial protocols. Since 2019 we have enrolled over 2000 patients suffering from life-threatening conditions such as cancer, HIV, multiple myeloma, and rare diseases. While 2,000 patients may seem small in the context of a widespread condition like diabetes, it is substantial when you consider the critical nature of the diseases we are addressing.

These trials not only provide early access to cutting-edge treatments but also involve over 200 Mexican healthcare professionals as investigators. This engagement allows these professionals to interact with the latest innovations, enhancing their expertise and contributing to the broader medical community. Our commitment to clinical trials in Mexico is unwavering, and we believe the country has immense potential to become a major hub for clinical research, not only in Latin America but globally. However, realizing this potential requires overcoming certain challenges that currently hinder the process.

What are the challenges and opportunities for Mexico to become a global hub for clinical trials, and what steps are necessary to achieve this goal?

Mexico has all the ingredients necessary to become a global hub for clinical trials—a large population of over 130 million, strong infrastructure, and a highly capable medical community. However, several challenges must be addressed to unlock this potential. The most significant obstacle is the lengthy regulatory approval process. While some countries can approve clinical trial protocols within 45 to 60 days, Mexico’s process can take up to 180 days, To compete on the global stage, Mexico needs to declare clinical trials a national priority, streamline the approval process, and establish a clear and predictable legal framework that protects the intellectual property generated from these trials.

A robust legal framework is essential, particularly in the context of intellectual property rights and data protection. The United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), known as TMEC in Mexico, provides an opportunity to reinforce these protection mechanisms. For example, TMEC includes provisions that allow for the extension of patents to cover delays caused by regulatory agencies,

which is crucial for pharmaceutical companies. As TMEC is due for review next year, Mexico has a timely opportunity to strengthen its commitment to protecting intellectual property, thereby creating a more favourable environment for clinical trials.

By addressing these challenges—having regulatory timelines and ensuring strong intellectual property protections—Mexico could significantly enhance its appeal as a destination for clinical trials. This would not only attract substantial investment but also generate a multiplier effect across the economy, benefiting the entire healthcare ecosystem. Johnson & Johnson, along with other pharmaceutical companies represented in AMIIF, is fully committed to this.

How does Johnson & Johnson approach partnerships and what role do these collaborations play in advancing healthcare outcomes in Mexico?

As the largest healthcare company in the world, Johnson & Johnson carries a profound corporate social responsibility, which is deeply rooted in our credo principles and values. This responsibility compels us to forge strategic partnerships that not only promote innovation but also enhance healthcare outcomes. We firmly believe that significant progress in healthcare requires the collaboration of all stakeholders, including government entities, industry chambers, scientific community, patient advocacy groups and healthcare institutions.

In Mexico, we actively participate in several key industry organizations, such as the Mexican Association of Pharmaceutical Research Industries (AMIIF) and the National Chamber of the Pharmaceutical Industry (Canifarma). Additionally, as an iconic American company, we engage closely with the US. Chamber of Commerce and the American Chamber of Mexico. These platforms enable us to advocate for the critical value of innovation and to help create conditions that allow our innovations to reach the patients who need them most.

Our partnerships extend beyond industry associations to direct collaborations with government institutions. Through these alliances, we strive to ensure that innovation is recognized as a cornerstone of healthcare improvement, leading to equitable access to advanced treatments in a sustainable manner. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) are central to our strategy, as we understand that solving the most urgent health challenges requires the combined efforts of both the public and private sectors. This collaborative approach is essential for developing long-term solutions and ensuring that our contributions align with the best interests of the country and its citizens.

What are the key areas of focus for Johnson & Johnson's partnerships with the Mexican government, and how do these collaborations aim to transform the healthcare system?

Our collaborations with the Mexican government focus on strategic areas that have the potential to significantly transform the healthcare system. One of our primary areas of focus is digitalization, which we see as a crucial enabler of more efficient and effective healthcare delivery, that would ensure that innovative treatments reach patients more swiftly.

Another critical focus is on clinical trials. We believe that Mexico is well-positioned to become a leading hub for clinical research, not only within Latin America but on a global scale. However, to realize this potential, we must address challenges such as regulatory delays and the need for stronger legal protections for intellectual property.

Data and advanced analytics are also pivotal to our strategy. The integration of real-world evidence, phase four clinical trials, and artificial intelligence provides invaluable insights into the real-life performance of treatments. This data-driven approach allows for more informed decision-making, ensuring that public health resources are allocated in the most effective and efficient manner.

In all our efforts, we emphasize the importance of transparency, trust, and reliability. We are committed to fostering a transparent and collaborative relationship with the government, ensuring that all decisions are made in the best interests of the country and its patients.

By focusing on these strategic areas—digitalization, clinical trials, and data analytics—we are confident that we can significantly impact the healthcare landscape in Mexico, helping the system evolve to meet the challenges of the future.

Having dedicated 18 years to Johnson & Johnson, alongside many of your colleagues, including CEO Joaquin Duato, who have similarly long tenures, what factors have driven your deep commitment to the company?

My commitment to Johnson & Johnson is rooted in a profound alignment between my personal values and the principles embodied in the company's credo. The values instilled in me by my family—integrity, respect, and a strong sense of responsibility—are mirrored in the way J&J operates. Over the past 18 years, across various roles and geographies, I have never been asked to

compromise on these values. This consistency has allowed me to bring my authentic self to work every day, fully engaged and motivated.

What also drives my deep commitment is J&J's mission, which goes far and beyond financial success to focus on making a lasting impact on global health. The company's dedication to making diseases a thing of the past gives my work a profound sense of purpose. Knowing that the efforts of our team contribute to real, meaningful change in people's lives is incredibly fulfilling and energizes me daily.

Moreover, J&J's unwavering commitment to leadership development has played a significant role in my journey. The company not only prioritizes professional growth but also ensures that its employees are supported in all aspects of their lives and that diversity and inclusion are embedded in everything we do.

Throughout my career, I have had the opportunity to work across different continents and roles, always feeling backed by a company that values my well-being and that of my family. This holistic approach to employee development and support has been instrumental in sustaining my enthusiasm and dedication over the years.

In essence, it is the combination of shared values, a mission that genuinely matters, and a strong commitment to personal and professional growth that has kept me deeply connected to Johnson & Johnson for 18 years. I am as motivated today as I was on my first day, knowing that I am part of an organization that truly makes a difference in the world.

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