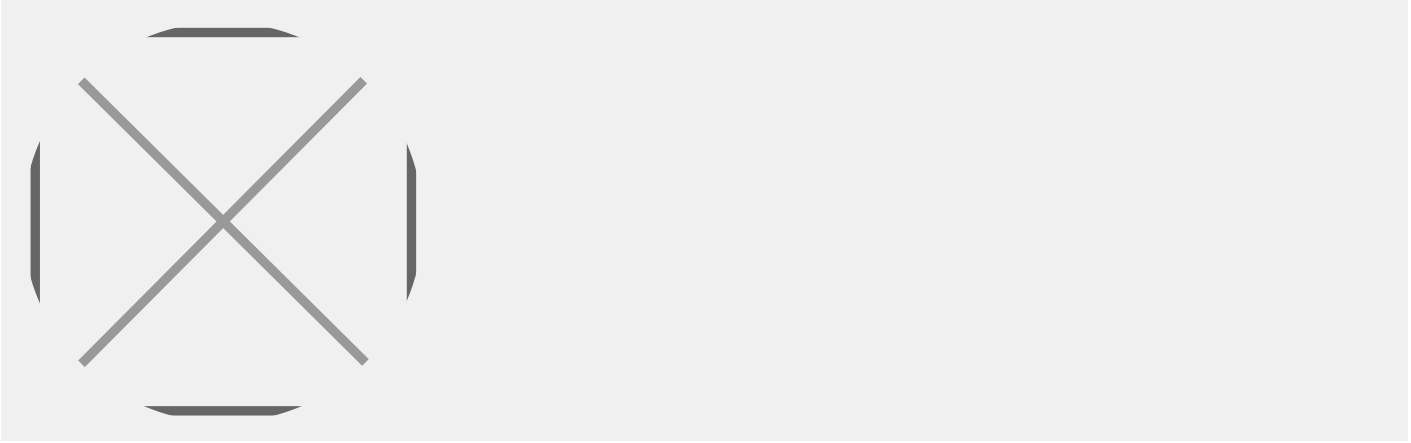
# Interview: Ramón Palou de Comasema, Country Director, Amgen Portugal



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*Ramón Palou de Comasema, Country Director of Amgen Portugal, talks about the struggle to enter the reimbursement process in Portugal, how Amgen Portugal has broken this trend by having three of its products reimbursed in the last four years, and further highlights the affiliate's successes and future growth outlook.*

**How did Amgen celebrate its twentieth anniversary this year in Portugal?**

Despite the current environment in this country, Amgen Portugal had its cycle meeting at the beginning of the year, in which we had a small celebration. This was actually a surprise to many, who had not realized that 20 years had gone by. Our celebration involved reflecting over what had happened over the past two decades, the number of patients that Amgen had treated, and the history of the affiliate. This event was great for those who had been with the affiliate for a long time in terms of witnessing the evolution of the affiliate. It was also a good opportunity to focus on the future. It is important to face the future with confidence in order to reinforce success.

**You became country manager in 2011, when the country entered the crisis. As a company that relies on new products, what was your initial strategy when you arrived?**

Two years ago, Amgen had to readjust its structure to the evolution of the market. My first strategy was to define the focus of people on future priorities. Once people and structure were established, we focused on the current products in our portfolio. Amgen needed to maintain its current

structure in terms of product sales and work on new products in our pipeline to be approved in Portugal. In reality, it has not been easy to provide access to innovation in Portugal in the last year. Nevertheless, Amgen has been successful in the last few years in demonstrating to the authorities the benefit of our molecule products first for patients in terms of clinical value and savings to the health system, which holds true for all companies. Amgen had three of its products reimbursed in Portugal in the last four years; that is the biggest success I feel we have had in this country in recent times.

**What did you do to specifically demonstrate that value?**

The value demonstration involves presenting solid evidence that the new drug will add therapeutic value to the current practice, while showing that investing in this new treatment is good value for money. In our dialogue with the authorities, it is more and more important to show that we are aware of the current financial problems in the NHS and therefore we focus on providing solutions, instead of just asking for a drug reimbursement approval, disregarding the current scenario. There is still much room to improve that dialogue between industry and government; however, Amgen is on the right path. We are preparing the future in terms of value demonstration. The dialogue with the authorities regarding reimbursement, needs to start before approval from the European authorities, and involves the identification of the relevant data that needs to be collected in order to demonstrate the added therapeutic value and economic advantage of the new treatment.

**Do you think the government appreciates commitment in terms of clinical trials?**

I think they do; but more importantly the government realizes that clinical trials are critical for the future. Clinical trials are a way of ensuring early access to innovation, obtaining clinical expertise and are one way to attract investment to the country. As a country, Portugal has significant potential to improve in terms of implementation of clinical trials. The expertise of clinicians in hospitals here is unprecedented. However, we need to improve processes. I think there is a focus in the country to improve clinical trial development in Portugal. The protocol recognizes the value that clinical trial investments bring to the country despite the fact that R&D investments have declined in Portugal from most pharmaceutical companies. The most important part of this is to ensure that in the future, companies will continue to invest in Portugal.

**How can Amgen contribute to that?**

The industry needs to think in the long term. Companies like Amgen that maintain their commitment here are clearly focused on innovation. Even with all the structural changes in the last year, Amgen has still maintained its R&D footprint in Portugal. We have kept and will increase the

number of clinical trials here. Furthermore, investing in research institutes and hospitals to build facilities for trials will also be important for all companies here.

**How many clinical trials does Amgen currently operate in Portugal?**

This affiliate has 14 trials with the participation of 60 institutions today. In the future we expect to increase this number because of Amgen's pipeline; we have 50 molecules in our pipelines worldwide, six of which are in their last phases. We therefore expect to grow both the number of clinical trials centers entering new pathologies, and number of patients. This increase in trials comes at a time when many pharmaceutical companies in Portugal are reducing their R&D footprint. Additionally, this increase in R&D is reflective of the Amgen organization globally.

**Amgen was operating at USD 50 million in sales in 2006, when we interviewed your predecessor. How has the company grown since then?**

Two years ago, the company was still in that sales range. In the last two years, it has been impacted because of the drastic changes in the hospital market. Despite launching three products in the last four years, we have not been able to compensate the price pressure from national products in Amgen. That being said, I am confident in Portugal's future, which is definitely growing based on the data from the 2014 health budget.

**What is the strategic importance of Amgen Portugal in the organization?**

Portugal is a bit contradictory in that we have significant barriers for access to innovation, while in other ways this is a very innovative country. Seven years ago, Portugal was the first country to implement capitation, followed by the US and then other EU countries. Portugal was also the first country in Europe to adopt HTA evaluation. This is the way the Amgen organization looks at Portugal. This affiliate brings excellent experience in such areas that are going to be important for the future of Amgen worldwide. A number of Portuguese employees work in Amgen's headquarters as a result of this country's exportable talent. Compared to other countries, Amgen really values the experience gained in Portugal because of the environment.

**It certainly seems like there is an immense talent pool here, would you agree?**

Not only is there talent, but the development of talent in Portugal is unprecedented. The current environment helps Amgen Portugal to develop that talent. Thus, Amgen and other organizations in Portugal are not only able to attract talent but also develop it. While the top management in Amgen is aware of the Portuguese crisis, simultaneously they realize the value of the experience of the talent of the Portuguese organization.

**What will be the main growth drivers for Amgen Portugal in 2014?**

Growth drivers need to be new molecules. Looking ahead to the next three years, Amgen is in a unique position in the market at this moment. We are going to launch six molecules in the next three to four years and then again in the following years. The potential is huge. The ability to bring those innovative molecules to the Portuguese market is critical both clinically and economically.

**What management strategies have you implemented to motivate your staff in this tough cycle?**

That was actually my priority when I became country manager here. It is critical to maintain the passion of your people while fulfilling the mission. We must demonstrate the benefit for patients and society at large to people. It is a good example that Amgen Portugal brings to other affiliates—despite the crisis, we maintain the spirit with passion. Role modeling is also important.

**You seem very relaxed. What keeps you awake at night?**

I try to differentiate between working for Amgen and life outside of Amgen. However, I am concerned by the waiting time for reimbursement processes in Portugal. People are also very important for me. Every employee in Amgen makes a difference. Therefore, when your responsibility grows, you have to work more through people

**What would you like to have personally achieved in the next five years?**

I would really love to see the entire Amgen portfolio available in Portugal. When I came here three years ago, my original aim was to launch a specific product. Until now, we still have not been able to launch that product. Portugal is one of the few countries in Europe in which this product is not available. For me that is disheartening. In five years, therefore I would like to see the whole portfolio of Amgen in this country.

I am confident in Amgen but also in Portugal. There really is a lot of talent in this country. When I first came here I realized this talent, as well as in other pharmaceutical companies. When I started working with clinicians, I realized this even more. Therefore, I am very confident in the future of Portugal’s pharmaceutical industry.

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