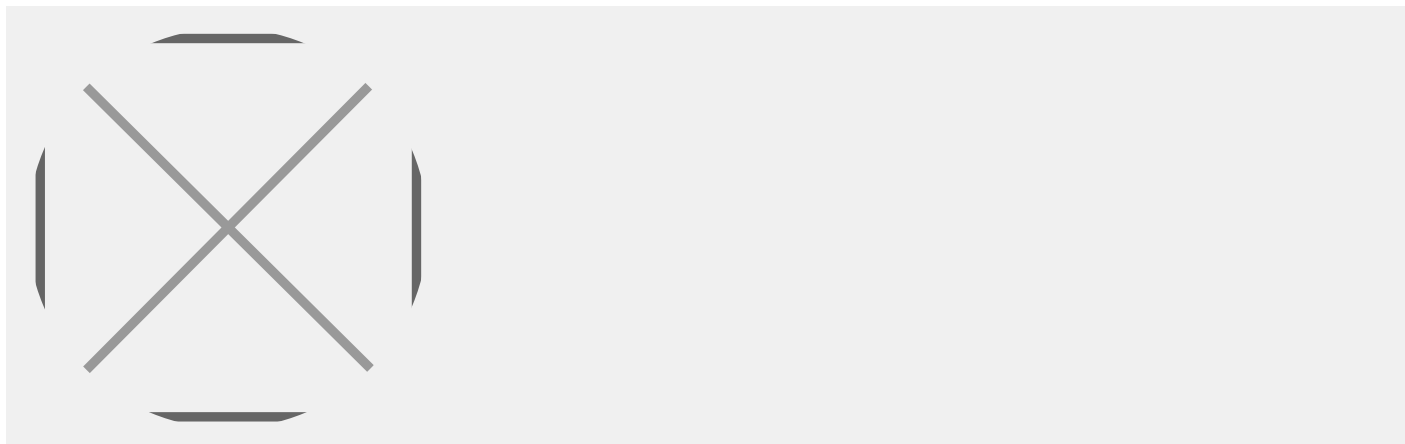


Interview: Diane Gosselin, President and CEO, CQDM, Canada



07.10.2013

Tags: [Cardiology](#), [CQDM](#), [Infectious diseases](#), [Life Sciences](#), [Neurology](#), [Oncology](#), [R&D](#),

The president & CEO of CQDM discusses her vision of how CQDM's activities can have a direct impact on the development of safer and more efficient drugs, and how to bring CQDM to a more globally competitive level.

You were appointed as CEO of CQDM about ten months ago. What were your initial objectives when you took up the position?

Let me start by saying that I truly believe in CQDM's model and I see it as a mission. Prior to becoming CEO, I was VP of Research Business Development, and taking this position was a great opportunity to demonstrate CQDM's ability to impact pharmaceutical research and drug development. My goal here is to ensure that this model expands.

One of the primary functions of CQDM is to focus on the development of innovative tools as a means of accelerating the drug development process. What are the primary challenges associated with drug development in Quebec and Canada?

It must be clearly understood by everyone that drug development is an extremely risky, long and costly process. That being said, the industry needs to work on improving this, which most importantly requires capital. This process also requires great patience because developing a new drug takes about 15 years, and the probability of success is not very high. It is clear that more money is needed in the Life Science sector in Québec and Canada. The real focus for the country

should be on how to attract more money in Canada. We need to find ways to be more competitive, both locally and internationally. While CQDM wants to attract some private and public investment, competitiveness and efficiency must increase, and new models will be required to do that. The old models are clearly not working very well, especially in early stage research where there is no demonstration of a financial reward.

What might be an example of such a model?

Several public/private partnerships have been developed as new models. CQDM is a good example of a new model, but I do not want to say that it is the only solution to the funding problems of this industry. New and different models that address these problems are also necessary. Such examples include AmorChem, CDRD and NEOMED. Time will tell if these models can really bring some value.

Access to capital is always a challenge for biotech companies. Big pharmaceutical companies sometimes miss the opportunity for symbiotic partnerships with biotech companies because such decisions are taken at the corporate level rather than country level. Could something more be done to create that attraction between big and small?

There are several answers. Firstly, it is not just a matter of biotech partnering with the pharmaceutical industry; it must also take into account the partnerships that pharma companies have with universities, investigators and scientists. It is true that most decisions are taken on a global level and it is very difficult to find partnerships that way. The best way to secure effective partnerships in that sense is to be competitive and well positioned on an international level. This is something that is occasionally forgotten. Canada does want to be the best in its strengths, but Canada does not compare itself to other countries. Multinational pharmaceutical companies are looking for one-solution businesses with the best talent all around the world, but Canadians do not tend to compare themselves in this way.

Why should the world look to Canada, or Quebec? What does it have to offer that sets it apart from the competition?

Canada is strong in certain sectors, but this requires more specificity. We need to look at it from a sector point of view. Canada is very strong in life sciences. In terms of therapeutic areas, Canada is strong in neurology, oncology, cardiology, and infectious diseases, but so are many other countries. Canada has a number of key opinion leaders, which is an advantage. The country needs to take a step back and look at the industry on a macro level—who and where are the top scientists, and the potential network that can be created from this. Generally, I think Quebec is

extremely innovative from a scientific point of view. However, when you go talk to a pharmaceutical company that is clearly not enough. Quebec needs to be very specific about what it can bring, and especially needs to position specific projects or expertise within the rest of the world.

The funds of CQDM are divided between the private sector, the Canadian government, and the Quebec government. Is this investment reflective of a trend of the government to be actively participating in the life sciences industry?

For the Canadian and Quebec government, there is a strong interest in partnering with the industry, investing in projects where the industry is putting down money. That type of proportion is very typical within the industry. For each dollar the government invests, they want at least one dollar for private investment. This is a rough estimate.

CQDM offers five funding programs: “Focus” for late-stage technologies, “Explore” for early-stage technologies, a Quebec-Ontario program, a Quebec-France program, and a Quebec-Massachusetts program. What is the rationale behind developing each of these programs?

All of CQDM's programs are completely dedicated to the development of tools that can facilitate or accelerate the drug discovery process. When CQDM was created five years ago, there was only one program. This was the late-stage program, which brought new and strong results for the discovery process. These are very large-scale projects that are being funded with applicable results to be delivered at the end of the projects. CQDM realized in order to capture true innovation, there needs to be small investments for early stage risky projects which is why CQDM created the Explore competition for potential disruptive technologies. The organization established the program with France because research is global, and therefore should not be isolated in Quebec. In order to increase Quebec's research competitiveness, it is best to collaborate with strong regions globally. It is natural for Quebec to collaborate with France because there are many synergies between the two, especially in medical devices, imaging, diagnostics, vaccines and neurology. After France, CQDM would like to move to the UK, Germany and Switzerland because of the great science and very strong pharmaceutical presence in these countries.

The Quebec-Ontario program was established for the same reason. The creation of the Quebec-Ontario corridor in 2011 involved a real collaboration of both provinces' governments, and has provided great research partnership opportunities. Finally, the partnership with the Boston area is because of Quebec's proximity to an area that everyone recognizes as being extremely rich in

biotech, home to many R&D sites and great universities, and with the Massachusetts Life Sciences Center, there is a great alignment in terms of both sides' objectives.

Will you look to other R&D hubs in emerging markets?

Of course it is always a possibility. However, CQDM is fairly young, and needs to go step by step to become a strong organization.

Is there any particular area that you see as having the most potential?

In terms of sectors, CQDM needs to follow the needs of the industry, which are largely related to diseases among the ageing population. Many chronic diseases do not have effective treatments let alone real solutions, and there are many challenges to develop new drugs for diseases such as Alzheimer's due to a lack of a good diagnosis. However, neurology, oncology, metabolic diseases, and cardiovascular diseases are the main areas of focus at the moment. It is important to stress that CQDM wants to have an impact on research, and address the most critical challenges that the biopharmaceutical industry is facing. As long as the organization brings something to research that reduces risks or costs, CQDM will be able to play an important role in pharmaceuticals.

In what way has the creation of CQDM served as a role model for other provinces or countries as a means of encouraging those kinds of relationships within the industry?

CQDM is fairly unique in the world. Other provinces have some interest in trying to recreate CQDM, and I am very proud of this and will support it as much as possible. The impact of CQDM is prevalent in that big Canadian funding granting agencies that are more focused on academic research are very interested right now in partnering with CQDM because it provides a link to the pharmaceutical industry. This is a very interesting achievement from CQDM's point of view. I think that Quebec and Canada can show the value of partnerships between academic research and the pharmaceutical industry, and these partnerships will start to appear more frequently.

Has your change in position from VP of Research Business Development to CEO opened opportunities in terms of pet projects?

As I mentioned, I really believe in the model of CQDM. For me it is a great opportunity to ensure that the organization survives the ups and downs of the industry. I want to ensure that CQDM can demonstrate the effectiveness of the model, and that the organization can provide real impact for research. I dream of being able to show how CQDM's activities have a direct impact on the development of safer and more efficient drugs. That is my ultimate goal. I also want to bring CQDM to a more global level. I think that CQDM is ready to do that, so being in this position will allow me

to focus on internationalization, and ensure that CQDM adapts to the new models of the pharmaceutical industry. Essentially, the organization must remain extremely flexible and find ways to significantly contribute.

If we were to return to Canada in another three to five years, what is your vision for CQDM at that point?

CQDM will initiate an expansion throughout the rest of Canada, extending its activity to the country. However, it is not just about being throughout Canada; rather, we need to bring ourselves to a global level. The country's critical mass of researchers and their competitiveness must both be augmented, and only if that is successful will organizations like CQDM become more global. It is not just a perk, but also a necessity in order to become present within this globalization of research. CQDM needs to become global in order to be successful.

I think that all the stakeholders in the biopharma industry should find a way to work together. The key will be of course to obtain capital and to be competitive from the international perspective, as well as bringing the pharmaceutical companies, biotech companies, universities, patient groups and governments to collaborate. It is the only way to find real solutions to very complex problems.

[See more interviews](#)