Interview with Jane Villablanca, General Manager, Janssen Pharmaceutica

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Tags: Janssen Pharmaceutica

Can you please start by giving to our readers an overview of your background and your involvement with Janssen?

I am a Public Health graduate and have completed an MBA program, so I have a combination of science and business. I have been with the Pharma industry for over 20 years – I have worked with MSD, Schering Plough and now with Janssen for the past 10 years.

Asia has become recently the fastest growing region in the global pharmaceutical market and multinationals have been increasingly focused this promising region. What is the importance of the ASEAN region for Janssen and what role do the Philippines play within this Asian focus?

Asia Pacific has become a huge, fast growing, and a very important region for Janssen. Due to its vast geography, we have subdivided our business in clusters to tap as much opportunity as possible. There are a lot of opportunities even in South-East Asia and, of course, each market is unique however similar they may seem to be in certain aspects. We have also divided them in reimbursement and self-paid markets. In the case of the Philippines, it is a self-paid market: 80% of the business go thru drugstores, driven by prescriptions with a lot of OTC products in the market.

Unfortunately, we generally do not have reimbursed medicine in the Philippines because the government does not pay enough for healthcare. They do cover a little bit through Philhealth but it is largely self-paid. That is the reason why self-medication is very popular. People would rather buy

cough medicine over the counter than go to a doctor for a prescription.

Overall, the Philippine Pharma market had a bad year last year with the growth slowing down markedly to about 2.8% from an average of 9-10% prior to the implementation of the Cheaper Medicines Law. Multinational companies were more affected than local companies.

Janssen in the Phils was not spared from the effects of the new government regulations but managed to register growth this year and have somehow reversed the trend.

We see that the role government plays in health care should increase in the future. Expectations are there; people are comparing with the richer neighboring countries with some form of reimbursement. It’s true that it will get better but the question is how long it would take. Of course, a lot depends on the new Secretary of Health and our new President.

In the past, the industry was free to do anything and there was very little regulation while now, over the past 2-3 years, more and more legislations are affecting the industry.

The Philippines may not be contributing much to the growth of the ASEAN countries now but I am positive that as soon as we hurdle the current environmental challenges, the Philippines will soon be a major growth engine for the ASEAN region.

Among the companies that we have interviewed, some have adopted voluntary price reductions while other have maintained a status quo, waiting for a compulsory reduction mandated by the government. What strategies has Janssen adopted to react to this threat?

As a gesture of good will, Janssen offered a price reduction for a few products. Janssen volunteered a 50% discount for a product used in hospitals for open heart surgery. We volunteered hoping that if enough companies volunteer, the government would not mandate any price cuts. In the end, during the first round, price cuts were mandated for five large products, but I see it as the last resort after all the other efforts. However the good thing was that during the second round, the government accepted whatever was offered and did not force any discounts.

The Aquino Government took office one week ago, with a new Secretary appointed, Hon. Enrique Ona. What are your expectations on the new administration and do you think he will carry on what Secretary Cabral has set in action?

Former Secretary Cabral has made a lot of good initiatives and was a very strong-willed person but I think that there was not enough time for her to really implement new initiatives. I met Dr Ona, who is a Transplant Surgeon and Head of the National Kidney and Transplant Institute, a couple of

years back. The National Kidney and Transplant Institute was one of our points of contact because one of Janssen's products is used for by patients undergoing dialysis and we used to have a product for kidney transplant patients.

About three years ago Dr Ona and I had a very good discussion about policies in health care financing. He also mentioned that he was invited to chair a group that studied the improvement of health coverage in the Philippines. He explained to me what they were doing, their plans concerning the Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and the possible ways to promote the necessity of health insurance. As a matter of fact, health has never been a priority in the Philippines while it is actually a basic right as stipulated in the Constitution. His arguments sounded very rational to me.

As President Aquino said in his speech, his agenda is Universal Health coverage in three years. If he manages to introduce it in the legislation, everybody will follow.

One of the objectives of Janssen has always been continuous development of better drugs to improve the quality of life. How has this objective been applied in the Philippines? How is Janssen contributing to the improvement Filipino's lives?

First, Janssen is contributing through innovative medicine because we feel responsible for bringing the products to the Philippines. Secondly, there is high commitment to make new innovative products available through partnering with the government and doctors in terms of access. As I have said, voluntarily price reduction is not a sustainable measure. In the Philippines, there are patient groups that are trying to advocate more awareness about the healthcare. We can partner with them. Thirdly, education is a huge component. We can partner with the government and deliver healthcare to people.

Education is crucial in so many aspects, especially in CNS which bears a social stigma. What are the challenges and opportunities for Janssen to market its products in the Philippines?

One of the biggest medical stigma is around mental disorders. In terms of the challenges, public awareness and educating the families should be a priority. In any case, I believe that the government should play a more active role. For instance, if there is a patient suffering from schizophrenia in a family, the normal procedure of treatment is to sedate them instead of keeping them awake to make them more functional. What the doctors and families should look for is a medicine to improve their quality of life. This is why we have initiated 'Family Link' program which educates the families of patients with mental disorders. We even have a program to help the policemen deal with agitated people or hostage takers on the streets. Part of the education is to ask the policemen to bring the allegedly sick people to the National Center for Mental Health.

Accordingly, we made this procedure easier in terms of the paperwork. After so many lectures, the Police Force have included this program in the training course for the new recruits. These little steps have been accumulating for 5 years as small contributions in making a huge difference.

What is the potential for future development of Janssen in the Philippines and where would you like to bring the company in the next 3-5 years?

I am sure that things will get better for the Philippines. There is a lot of room for growth in terms of OTC business – because it is a self-medication market. Rx business will grow as well particularly for the highly specialized products because this is something that we should bring here and we have a moral obligation to do so. One of Janssen's strong advantages is a very stringent health care compliance code of ethics, and it is my personal responsibility to make sure it is followed. We would like to uphold our high ethical standards as we market our products in all parts of the world.

In the next 5 years, Janssen will be a major player in the Philippines Pharmaceutical Market bringing highly specialized, innovative products that will create a meaningful difference in Filipino lives. We will continue to operate with the highest ethical standards in line with our Credo.

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On a personal note, what attracted you to work for Janssen?

It is the Credo! I came from a similar corporate management philosophy and what attracted me was the Johnson & Johnson Credo. It is how we operate, how we manage our business. As I am a public health graduate, it is something that is aligned with my own individual principles and values. I am in the right place with the right company.

What would be your final message to the international PhEx readers?

Things will surely get better for the Philippines. I think that Janssen will remain a major contributor in the industry. On a personal note, during the remaining years of my life, as a Filipino, I want to make a difference in the healthcare system in the Philippines. As I said, there is a lot of room for improvement such as introducing better healthcare delivery in the rural areas. If I happen to see the Universal Health Coverage implemented, it would be a great milestone.

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