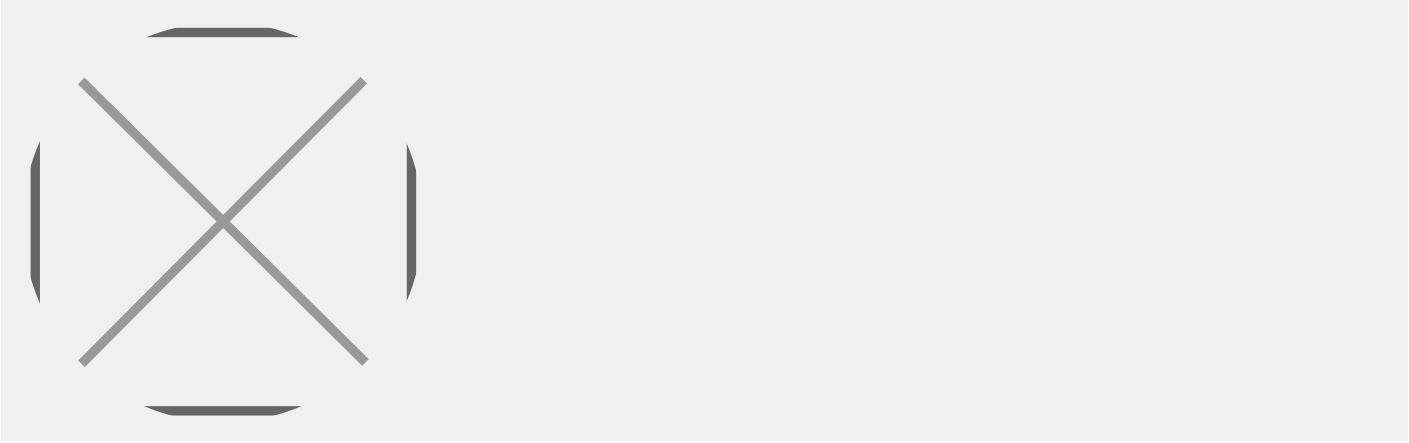
Interview with Osvaldo de la Fuente, Director General, Roche Argentina



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Tags: Roche Argentina

Argentina was home to Roche´s first Latin American subsidiary. Today, how important is Argentina for Roche worldwide?

Argentina will become this year the third affiliate –after Brazil and Mexico-in terms of sales in Latin America, which of course makes it an important country for the Roche business, from a regional perspective.

Naturally, worldwide the market is led by the G8 and the BRIC- TMK countries due to the economic and demographic potential of these affiliates. However, the entire LA region has had a sustained growth over the last years, contributing to the successful Roche business model, and Argentina has been a key player in this growth.

You are one of the only multinationals in Argentina that has operations in Uruguay. How do these operations impact your business in Argentina?

Roche has a large affiliate in Uruguay, according to our strategy for the region. Both affiliates have developed a successful synergy by sharing their HR, finance, technical and IT departments. The commercial aspects of each remain independent and have to be managed according to local needs and regulations.

As manager of both affiliates, I share my time between both countries. The key has been to exploit all possible synergies and to build up strong teams in each affiliate to run operations.

Roche has shown its commitment to world healthcare working with governments and patients in recent global health crises. What is your commitment to Argentina today?

Roche has been in Argentina for almost 80 years and since its foundation our commitment to patients –our key driver- has grown stronger.

As an innovative company we work to develop and bring, to patients and healthcare professionals, solutions for unmet diagnostic and medical needs and treatments that cure diseases or extend survival with a better quality of life. We work close to health authorities, medical associations, and patient organizations with one shared objective: Every medical innovation reaches patients who need them. In order to achieve this, we focus on medical education for physicians and other health professionals.

How do you find the balance between the business aspect and the human aspect of your responsibilities?

Corporate responsibility has been a priority for Roche since its foundation more than 110 years ago. As a healthcare company, we work hard to research and develop new medicines, and we are proud of the revolutionary drugs Roche has brought into the market over the last decades. Worldwide, the pharmaceutical industry has another big challenge ahead, and that is to be part of the discussion, together with health authorities and policy makers, to improve access to new treatments and make sure that every patient receives the treatment he or she needs.

The Ministry of Science and Technology has been recently created in Argentina, which shows some acknowledgment by the government of the issue. Do you think Argentina has the potential to deliver on the promises that it is making?

Argentina has high qualified human resources in all healthcare areas. I can think of many scientists and physicians that have made history with their research, like Milstein and Favaloro. The next step is to strengthen the environment in the country to promote basic research, which is the backbone of innovation and scientific progress. Another important aspect is to work for the creation of the right partnerships between basic research institutions and healthcare companies, which have the know-how to produce innovation in big scales and distribute them to other countries. This is the key to make sure that every innovation is brought into the market. California is a good example of how successful small-size companies have created win-win partnerships with the pharma industry.

Roche Argentina, together with the National Ministry of Science, Technology and Productive Innovation, has launched this year the “Roche Residence in Science”. Every year, the Ministry selects an Argentine scientist who is sent to a Roche R&D center for a six-month assignment. Once the internship is over, the scientist returns to the country with all the knowledge they have gained abroad. This three-year initiative is part of Roche’s sustained commitment to the

development of science in Argentina, and I believe that this kind of projects will help us take advantage of the enormous knowledge and talent there is in this country.

When we were speaking to Mr. Mitchell in Thailand, he was talking about the values and opportunities presented by having “the most innovative products in the industry” How do you capitalize on this strength in such an unusual market?

We have a clear focus on innovation and our treatments are the proof to that. All the stakeholders in the health system must share one main priority, and this is to bring treatments to patients. As I mentioned before, this is a challenge for all the involved parts, in order to improve access to treatments. Argentina has a complex health system. However, there’s is a huge strength in terms of high qualified professionals that know the treatments and the benefits they bring to the patients.

What would you describe as the main pillars of Roche Argentina?

Roche is leader in oncology, virology, transplant and diagnostic solutions. Our portfolio also includes two treatments for rheumatoid arthritis (one to be approved in the next months), and a CNS line. The RA franchise will be, in the future, one of the main pillars of the business, together with oncology.

What is your vision for the future growth of Roche Argentina? Where would you like to take the company over the next few years? Will you be expanding to new therapeutic areas?

Roche´s main two pillars, as I was saying, will be oncology and RA. The company has a clear strategy of focusing on specialized areas, for example: over the last years Roche has developed five oncology treatments that allow patients to reach remission and in other cases live longer with a better quality of life.

In line with the Group´s strategy, new products will be launched in the market in the next years for the metabolic area. And of course, the rest of our portfolio will remain strategic for the company.

Whenever we talk to Roche General Managers in other countries, one of the recurring themes is how an innovative company such as Roche relies on human resources. You´ve already mentioned the excellent potential for this in Argentina. How do you feel that you are making the most of the human resources in the country, particularly in relation to R&D?

Talent management is one of Roche Argentina´s main activities at the moment, because if the company has the right people, then it will succeed. As a business, we are continuously training our people and giving them as many opportunities as possible. We are currently recruiting younger talents, and are trying to attract people, retain them, give them career opportunities and try to show them there are global opportunities for them in Roche. Last year, the company ranked second in the Apertura Magazine ranking of best places to work in Argentina.

In terms of R&D, Roche Argentina has focused on this area and the research team has grown from one person four years ago to 35 that are working nowadays. We are investing a significant amount of money in clinical trials in Argentina, and we plan to increase the investment in this area. Our country has a great potential for clinical trials because of the excellent professional level, the patient's characteristics, and research is done with the same quality standards as in Europe or USA. We are optimistic that the approval times will improve in Argentina and the region, in order to conduct processes in the same time frame as Europe or USA.

How would you define your management style?

I believe in the power of people, and successful teams. My first initiative here as General Manager was to build the right team and create trustful bonds among my team. In Argentina, as in all Latin American countries, a manager has to be flexible, hard worker and fast to be able to make the right decisions at the right time. Everything happens very fast and it is important to always be well informed of what is going on in the country and in the industry, and to know all the players in the business and learn how to deal with each one of them.

Although Argentina lacks the volume to be a world leader, it has the same levels of complexity as the most developed countries. The variables here are always changing and the challenges too. This makes the market really attractive for managers.

Do you think Argentina is a good school for managers?

It's a fantastic school. After leaving the country, many expatriated managers use Argentina as an excellent example of a place where your learn how to deal with challenges, obstacles, a fragmented and complex health care system, and many stakeholders: competitors, pharmacies, chambers, national authorities and policy makers.

If we were to come back in 5 years time, where would you like to have led Roche Argentina?

I would like Roche to keep on being the first multinational company in Argentina and a place where people want to work thanks to the opportunity Roche gives to professionals.

In terms of business, by that time, the company will be making a swift switch to new areas like diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. However, we have a solid strategy to keep on offering new and better treatments to patients and physicians.

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