

Dr. Javier Valverde - Health Commission President, Camara Argentinos-China



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Dr. Valverde, a respected authority on pharmacovigilance from the University of Mamonides, discusses the emerging pharmaceutical trade relationship between China and Argentina in the context of the dynamic Argentinian industry.

To begin, would you please introduce the Cámara Argentinos-China?

The Argentinian Republic and the People's Republic of China established trade relationships in the fifties; in 1972 diplomatic relations were built between both countries. In 1984, the growth of bilateral trade led to the creation of the Cámara Argentinos-China. We are a platform for dialogue between several Argentinian pharmaceutical companies and Chinese and international players.

Since its inception, the Chamber is taking concrete actions to promote a professional business relationship as well as increased trade between the two nations. Seminars, courses, business meetings, publications, trade missions, etc. are some of the activities that we have developed over the years. One of our main focal points is the Pharma industry. We see ourselves as advisors and brokers between the Pharma industry and other industries between both countries.

We maintain permanent contact and close collaboration with the Economic Commercial Office of the Embassy of the People's Republic of China and the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT), which enhances our chamber's activities by allowing our partners to enjoy a privileged position in their dealings with the Republic of China.

In terms of business relationship, trade between China and Argentina has been growing consistently over the past 15 years. For 2004 overall trade between the two countries has been approximately USD 4 billion. And in 2005, exceeded USD 5 billion! It is clear for us that the entry of China into the WTO in 2001 opened up many new business opportunities for Argentine exporters.

What are your top priorities at the moment, and your longer-term mission?

We are looking to standardize regulations and quality standards between Argentina and china; many Chinese products must raise their quality standards to meet the ones found in Argentina, and Argentinian products are struggling to compete with low-cost low-quality Chinese products in the Chinese market. We want to trigger the export and import development of new pharmaceutical technologies by selecting the most profitable and less time-consuming options (approvals take a lot of time). Entering the Chinese market is a very challenging task.

Biogenesis Bagó, one of the members of this Chamber, is really helping us to get there; they established a new manufacturing plant in China with one of their main products: a foot-and-mouth disease vaccine. They expect to produce 400 million doses of the vaccine; that is a huge endeavor but will represent an opening in the almost unpierceable Chinese market. Our job is to make their entrance to this market much easier. We want Chinese and Argentinian executives to meet under certain favorable circumstances, like health congresses for example; this are excellent points of assembly to start fertile business relationships.

Our job has been to foster a common language for all this companies that, otherwise, could not communicate their health issues with non-experts. CILFA (Industrial Chamber of Argentine Pharmaceutical Laboratories) has a strong presence in our chamber, but most of the entrepreneurs and representatives of the Argentinian Pharma industry have not noticed the importance of this commission. They want to do business in China but are unaware that they need a platform such as the Cámara Argentinos-China.

Argentina is one of the 5 countries in the world in which the domestic industry eclipses the international pharmaceutical players in terms of volume and revenue; CILFA represents those industries. The next logical step for us is to find international companies that want to reach China through Argentina by using Argentina as a production site to export to the Chinese market.

Both Argentina and China have very active governments. They are very involved in the pharmaceutical industry in many different ways; have they stepped in directly in any negotiations?

The government is not directly involved in this kind of negotiations. They do it through commissions such as ours. We are trying to bring everyone together to speak common topics and reach common goals; we unite the government with the private sector of the industry.

Cristina Kirchner, the Argentinian president wants to advance in all matters related to public health and drugs. There are many triumphs in the public health care, one example being Plan Remediar, which helps the government distribute all of the drugs purchased by national health programs so that everyone has access to great quality health care. The problem does not lie on insufficient public drug production but in its distribution. We want to create a scheme in which we will enter the distribution chain, but, that project is still on the drawer. On the other hand, we're not just interested in the development and distribution of drugs but in all things related to Health Technology, that is, anything that can improve a patient's health.

Are there any future projects for your Commission?

The two main projects are professional training and clinical trials, to create a cooperation relationship with Chinese companies as well as an interest in the Argentinian industry. Argentina is an excellent training ground for health care professionals, maybe the best in Latin America. We are experts on drug production techniques and many other health related affairs, and are a point of reference for the rest of the continent. All of this may be happening because we are so similar to the FDA's medical devices requirements. We have a very strong bio-science and chemical industry and a lot of international students come to our universities to become experts. This is are just some of our inherent strengths. In terms of issues related to intellectual property with China, China and Argentina have very similar regulations.

What are your forecasts for future trends in the relationship between Argentina and China? Do you have a final message for our international readers?

China will provide our country with massive quantities of active pharmaceutical ingredients (API's) and drugs while we can provide them all the expertise related to cell therapies. China's government wants to provide those therapies free of cost to the public. Another thing we can do for them is to provide them with our expertise and guidance to the appropriate prescribing of medications and the standard operating and manufacturing procedures. Not everything is about the quality of the drugs, as we must also take in account the quality of procedures. Chinese people are still a little bit skeptical and hesitant because the health industry is not easy to understand and to cope with, but I'm sure that it's just a matter of time when we will be able to have a more open business relationship with them.

Latin American pharmerging market will outgrow their American counterparts. Argentina, Chile and Brazil will dominate the entire Latin American and Caribbean Pharmaceutical Industry. International players want to come to Argentina because they are aware that Argentina's demand for drugs is very high and its growth is undeniable. To put it in numbers, Argentinian Pharma industry will grow 12% while, in the rest of the world, it will only be a 5% growth.

Drugs and medications have reached a pinnacle in terms of potency, however their adverse impacts have also reached an alarming point. This is what we refer with quality excellence and procedures. We can now detect the symptoms of any medication and through several tests and pharmacovigilance procedures. What we want is to use all this knowledge to make all health related drugs as safe as possible.

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