

Interview: Lupita Zurita - Managing Director, Teleflex Mexico



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Teleflex is committed to solving the challenges of a changing healthcare environment in the areas of critical care and surgical applications by providing every day new products. The managing director of the Mexican affiliate walks us through the history of the company in the country and how the company is successfully adding new products to Teleflex's already vast portfolio.

Could you please introduce the company to our readers?

Arrow International started back in 1975 in the US to extend the use of catheterization for the diagnosis and treatment of critically ill patients. Arrow disposable critical care catheterization products are used principally to access the central vascular system for administration of fluids, drugs and blood products, but also for patient monitoring, and diagnosis. The company established its Mexican subsidiary in 1994, when I was appointed general manager and we started importing the products from the US, mainly focusing our sales on the public sector. In 2007 the US-based med tech company Teleflex acquired Arrow, also to leverage the company's operations in Mexico.

Today we distribute a wide portfolio of brands, which over time have all become part of Teleflex. The vascular product line under the brand Arrow is the strongest one, representing 45 percent of our total sales, followed by the respiratory and anesthesia lines under the Hudson brand, which make up 35 percent. The remaining 20 percent is split among different other lines. In 2012 Teleflex acquired the global market leader in laryngeal masks LMA, so our portion of respiratory and

anesthesia business increased, making us a very important player also in this segment, especially for patients who are difficult to intubate. We also offer disposable and reusable devices to the urology, anaesthesiology, gastroenterology and respiratory care markets under the brand Rüsçh as well as laparoscopy products under the brand Weck.

What would you say is Teleflex's most important competitive advantage on the Mexican market?

In the vascular area we have been able to keep 80 percent market share in catheters, mainly because the Arrow brand is highly recognized among physicians. When you say Arrow to a doctor they think of quality and innovation. We are currently working on the Hudson brand. The respiratory business is much more competitive and our positioning today is not as strong as with Arrow, but we are working to make it better in the close future.

Mexico is the second largest medical device market in Latin America. What trends are driving the industry according to your experience?

Mexico offers interesting opportunities in the medical devices segment, as it still is a very immature market. Our first-hand experience indicates physicians often carry out procedures not using the adequate devices, but rather with whatever they have at hand. In the vascular area, for example, many procedures are performed with anything but a catheter, especially in low-income regions. In Colombia, for example, we know that central venous access is handled with a specific catheter we distribute: this is not the case here in Mexico, an aspect which offers a number of opportunities.

Regulation for medical devices seemed to be a major hurdle in the past. How has this evolved over the past years?

The regulatory requirements are becoming increasingly stringent. Yet it is something positive, and companies operating in the market – local as well as international ones – should perceive this as a form of protectionism towards low quality producers, which want to flood the market with cheap products.

Third authorized parties have been appointed by the Federal Commission for the Protection against Sanitary Risk (COFEPRIS) to speed up the approval of medical devices because the authority does not have enough resources to follow-up on all registrations. The situation has become better, but I believe there are still significant areas of improvement, especially in terms of bureaucracy, times and costs. Our experience indicates third parties are often overwhelmed with work, so approval

times go way beyond what they should be. We have had cases where our documentation was lost or approval times took more than two years. Also, costs have increased exponentially: the fast track process implies higher charges and everything needs to be translated into Spanish.

I think that if a product has already been approved by international authorities such as the FDA and the EMA, for instance, recognition by the local authority should be much easier. Especially companies, which operate internationally, must respect high levels of compliance, so recognition and approval should be faster.

Teleflex recently announced the intention to move production of medical devices from Asheboro to Mexico. What is the vision behind this move?

The first production plant established by Arrow in Mexico back in 1994 was in the Northern state of Chihuahua. Over 20 years, the company has been able to develop very good talent, especially for vascular products. Teleflex's Asheboro plant also manufactures vascular products, so the decision to move it to Mexico is driven by cost competitiveness but also by the high specialization of the personnel we have in Chihuahua.

Mexico is a very important manufacturing hub for Teleflex: besides Chihuahua, we also have operations in Tecate and Nuevo Laredo, with most of the production re-exported to the US to be distributed all around the world.

What expectations do you have for 2015?

We are very optimistic about 2015, and also about the coming years. Teleflex will continue acquiring companies, which will strengthen our product portfolio. The company just acquired Vidacare, developer of a broad technology platform leader in the field of intraosseous (inside the bone) medicine, and Mini-Lap Technologies for laparoscopy. We are interested in getting all these products registered as soon as possible in Mexico to add them to our already vast portfolio.

We are also very keen to further explore the segment of infection prevention, which has a huge impact on patients' care and government's costs. Teleflex has recently launched on the market the ErgoPack System, a complete vascular access insertion system for infection protection, especially designed for intensive care. We currently have a product specialist only focusing on promoting this kit in Mexico and is giving us very good results. We are also working very closely with the association of nurses to foster prevention. We live in an infection environment, so it's key to prevent. We need to change the mindset of many doctors and let them understand we should help prevent, instead of curing.

What keeps you motivated at Teleflex after 20 years with the company?

I was hired in September 1994 to start the company's operations in Mexico. I have loved the company since I had the first interview for the position and I remember working from home during one year to register all the products. Some people say I should retire, but being able to bring innovative products and new technology to the market represents every day a new challenge for me, and the results are priceless.

Today we are a small team of 24 people, but they are all experts in what they do and working together motivates me a lot. We want to keep the company growing, and Arrow is the best evidence as the brand's market share is still growing after 20 years. As we made Arrow the leading brand in the market for catheters, now we want the other brands do the same.

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