Interview: Jennifer Power – Country Manager & Global Established Products Business Lead, Pfizer South Africa



17.07.2015

Tags: Pfizer, CSR, access, innovation, R&D

The country manager and Global Established Products Business Lead at Pfizer South Africa reveals how the private sector is committed to expanding healthcare for South Africans, why her ambition is to devise different sustainable business models that allow for more affordable medicines, and

how Pfizer must crack the emerging market model if its business model is to continue to succeed.

You have been the country manager at Pfizer South Africa for 6 months now. What are your first impressions of the South African healthcare market?

For a global pharmaceutical company to be successful in any environment requires two basic elements. Firstly, infrastructure that facilitates the diagnosis and treatment of patients, including a registration body that is efficient, as well as availability of healthcare practitioners to diagnose and treat.

Secondly, an enabling environment, an equitable governmental policy, is essential if we are to achieve our ambitions. South Africa already has many of these elements in place, while there is still much room for improvement. On the infrastructure side, the country has an extremely robust private sector, with well-trained physicians, a sophisticated reimbursement system, providing availability of healthcare to 20 percent of the population. The public sector is under more pressure, with around 50 percent of the healthcare spend having to provide for 80 percent of the population. You have a private sector that is committed to expanding healthcare for South Africans.

During my first six months, I have met with business owners of pharmacies, couriers, corporates and independents. I have also met with leaders of some of the major funders, as well as leading hospital administrators in the public sector, and my peers at both the innovative companies and the generics. There is no exception to the rule: the private sector is committed to expanding affordable and appropriate use of medicines for South Africans. This is something that is extremely exciting and empowering. Across the healthcare value chain, we all share the same objective. There is so much opportunity to do well for patients in the country that we can all have the same goal, and still complement each other.

Where do you see potential for improvement in the healthcare industry?

While South Africa´s Medicine Control Council (MCC) provides transparent processes for approving medicines, it is acknowledged that this body is under strain, with a work backlog and constrained resources. The industry is committed to helping the MCC work more efficiently, conducting direct discussions through our industry associations. There is a strong distribution capability in the private sector. There is a public private partnership (PPP) involving the ministry of health, Aspen and Imperial Health, that is assisting the department of health in distributing medicines through private sector pharmacies, working on the distribution chain and the tracking of the medicines. It is called Project Pay, and is an extremely promising initiative. There is tremendous potential for the private sector to partner with the government in helping to expand access to medicine. Building trust is essential when it comes to PPPs. Everything that we do as an industry reflects on us, we are one industry and the perception of us is one.

The company’s vision is ‘living our full potential in striving for a healthier southern Africa’. As a research-driven company, how is Pfizer striving to ensure that all South Africans have access to quality healthcare?

At Pfizer we spend almost USD 7 billion a year on R&D. Our primary contribution to global society is innovation in medicines. We have a great pipeline in vaccines, with a recent meningococcal B vaccine, and have a very robust oncology pipeline. The entire organization is committed to making lives healthier at a global level. Specifically in South Africa, we provide innovation, support on the ground in disease education, as well as continuing medical education for healthcare practitioners in both the private and public sectors. We provide a commitment to thinking differently about solutions at a local level.

The country already has a tiered pricing model: tenders and the private sector. I believe there might be more access model options than the one currently used in South Africa. But improving

access involves much more than just pricing. It requires the full infrastructure, the full value chain; affordability is just one aspect. Pfizer can have real influence in the supply of medicines, as well as the support on the ground and the education and training that accompanies the process. Pfizer has cracked the developed market model, providing affluent societies with medicines very effectively. For our business model to succeed in the many years to come, we need to crack the emerging market model. This will need to look different to the model we employ in developed markets.

In South Africa, working with the industry and the wider population, my ambition is to devise different sustainable business models that allow for more affordable medicines. Pfizer organises itself into commercial units corresponding to the life stage of our products. We have the Global Established Business Products Unit, the Global Innovative Product Business Unit, as well as the Vaccines, Oncology and Consumer Health Unit. Our model is that the owner of the business unit that is the largest in that country is also the country manager. I am the business unit owner for Established Products, our largest unit in the country, and so I am also country manager. Our Established Products line will have the first opportunity to try out models providing greater access, better affordability and more creative tiered pricing. At Pfizer we have a number of products available for conditions that the public sector is not treating. I can imagine a partnership with the government that gets these medicines to patients who need it in a way that works for the government and is also sustainable for our business.

What importance does the affiliate attach to partnering and building strategic and enduring relationships with relevant stakeholders?

Partnerships are of utmost importance. There is still so much to be done, and working on an individual level will not have the same impact as a multiple approach. Working together with IPASA, and the resources of 24 innovative companies, we can achieve so much more. I see real opportunity in the public health enhancement fund (PHEF), a consortium of the entire healthcare value chain. PHEF has brought together pharmacies, generic companies, logistic service providers and innovative pharmaceutical companies as well as the government, to agree on four areas where we all want to impact South African society. First, providing a pipeline of scientists to help drive innovation. Secondly, funding medical students, so ensuring that there are healthcare practitioners in the system. And thirdly, training hospital administrators. The fourth pillar concerns regulatory aspects. PHEF has partnered across the healthcare value chain, helping to build the required infrastructure to provide wellness, which in turn provides the country with economic development. Partnership is critical and is taking place both in theory and in action in South Africa. We are not going to be able to advance the healthcare industry without partnering with the government, which

is the largest healthcare provider, and which will have an increasingly large role to play.

How is Pfizer capitalizing on the country's strategic geographical location and economic advantages to use South Africa as a gateway to Africa?

All the fundamentals are there, the country has an equitable government policy and a strong healthcare infrastructure. Pfizer South Africa certainly acts as a gateway to the continent. As a region we believe that success in Africa is about local presence. When we select markets to amplify and succeed in, we use South Africa as the footprint, allowing us to start small and build up in other markets.

Pfizer was certified as a Top Employer 2014 in South Africa by the Top Employers Institute, for the third year in a row. What importance does Pfizer attach to its employees?

Having the heart and minds of Pfizer colleagues in what we do is essential. I believe that everyone who has made the decision to work at Pfizer wants to be part of making people healthier. Everything that we accomplish, from establishing our reputation in the marketplace, to establishing significant partners that help to grow the business, all comes down to the individual action of colleagues at Pfizer. This starts with a sense of pride in what they do, pride of what they belong to and ownership in what they are doing to contribute to the Pfizer vision. My number one priority is to ensure the engagement of all our colleagues towards our mission of getting more medicines to more patients in South Africa.

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