

Interview: Enrique Alejandro - Director and Team Leader (Finance), Pfizer, Puerto Rico



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Enrique Alejandro, Director and Team Leader (Finance) of Pfizer Puerto Rico discusses the pharma company's manufacturing assets in the country. He stresses the importance of innovation as a key to staying competitive in today's industry.

What products are being manufactured in Pfizer's Puerto Rico facilities?

In Barceloneta, our site produces Active Product Ingredient and solids. In Guayama the Consumer Healthcare facility makes Advil, Centrum, Caltrate and Nexium, among other products. The Vega Baja manufacturing site is focused on solid dosage products such as Lyrica, Celebrex and Lipitor. In terms of employment we have approximately 2,500 people working in manufacturing facilities, and over 100 in the affiliate's commercial division.

Do all three facilities cater to the global market?

Our three manufacturing facilities are global suppliers, sourcing product to more than 70 markets around the world.

Considering the often more attractive incentives offered to jobseekers by companies based in the US, how do you ensure that you can retain and maintain Puerto Rico's outstanding local talent?

One of the elements that help us retain talent is the collaboration between industry and academia, which is very strong. For example, we work closely with the University of PR's Mayaguez campus which houses the engineering school. Curricula have been modified to assure students closely understand the skills needed in the industry such as validation, process development and PAT, among others. Also, internship programs have been developed to expose the students to day-to-day experiences in a manufacturing facility.

In addition, in Puerto Rico companies like ours have a strong tradition of community outreach for close to 50 years.

The biopharmaceutical industry was and still is important for Puerto Rico's development, and people understand that. Many facilities have many second generation colleagues. They are the children of employees who worked in the industry in the early nineties and saw economic growth and social development in their communities as a result of their jobs.

Ireland and Singapore have learned and applied from Puerto Rico's strong compliance culture. Was Puerto Rico left behind in the dust a bit, and does there need to be rejuvenation in terms of lean focus?

Puerto Rico has been one of the biggest hubs of pharmaceutical manufacturing for the last 40 years. Therefore there is a strong culture of compliance spanning two generations. Through training and development, we have worked that culture into our facilities, so everyone understands why quality and compliance are so important to our patients. We need to keep building on this to maintain it as one of our strengths.

What is the dynamic like in meetings at the corporate level, where you are competing for investment with other manufacturing hubs?

Once quality and compliance of the hub have been established, the dynamic focuses on productivity of the asset base, supply reliability, infrastructure stability, and cost-competitiveness.

With so many acquisitions over the years, major consolidation in the industry has resulted in only a few key players left. Is Puerto Rico better off in that environment?

The pharmaceutical industry has a significant impact on the economy of Puerto Rico in terms of export and employment. Major consolidations bring with them network rationalizations, and that has impact on the number of jobs in the island. However, if the consolidations provide stability for the plants that remain and these maintain strategic roles that are bigger than before, that is good for Puerto Rico.

How important is Puerto Rico within Pfizer's manufacturing network?

Our manufacturing operations in Puerto Rico are strategic assets and global suppliers of Pharmaceutical, Consumer Healthcare and Active Product Ingredient, and are widely recognized for their commitment to compliance by regulatory agencies in more than 70 countries.

You have had a lot of experience in Pfizer. What drives you to continue working here?

Working at Pfizer has given me great career opportunities. I work hard so that our operations continue to thrive and we can maintain Pfizer's presence on the island, so that the new generations of professionals can have the same career opportunities that I had.

As one of the biggest employers in the pharmaceutical manufacturing industry in Puerto Rico, how do you want to see this organization evolve?

Our operations have been successful because we've learned to adapt to a changing environment and our workforce has embraced operational excellence. Going forward we need to leverage the qualities that helped us get to where we are so we are considered as a manufacturing site for the new generation of medicines.

You have been in a unique position to witness the development of the Puerto Rico pharmaceutical industry over the years solely from the Pfizer perspective. What have been some of the key defining moments in the growth of the company?

Our focus on Quality, Compliance, Supply Reliability and Cost/Cash/Value has defined our growth through the years. However, as with any other industry that operates in a dynamic environment, the past ten years have been a period of profound transformation for our operations. This has made us stronger, as our operations have embraced a continuous improvement mindset to enhance the competitiveness and assure we deliver a product of the highest quality to global markets. Our highly skilled workforce has been a key to assuring we work smarter every day and stay agile so we can adapt to changes in the operating environment.

Do you feel that Puerto Rico will continue to serve as a learning area for technology and introduction to innovation from which other countries can learn?

Certainly, and those of us in the life sciences industry have to sustain and promote this exchange. Medical devices are experiencing twofold growth which brings another platform to this country. Furthermore, Puerto Rico has bio hubs in a relatively small geographical area this positions us to be exposed to technologies and reach another level of global exposure as innovators.

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