

Interview: Ana Myriam Irizarry - Plant Manager, LifeScan, Puerto Rico



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Ana Myriam Irizarry, plant manager for LifeScan in Puerto Rico, discusses the competitive nature of the facility's production of diabetes test strips and the immense talent that Puerto Rico has to offer in terms of manufacturing talent.

What makes LifeScan's test strips so innovative?

It is the quality of our product that makes it a choice for diabetes patients, both type-1 and type-2. There is also a product being made in LifeScan's sister company right now, which not only measures the glucose level in the blood but hematocrit. In this business you have to think about being innovative and cost competitive all the time.

Given the rise of malnutrition in regions like Europe or Latin America, how is LifeScan responding to these changes worldwide and what preventative measures are you taking?

As J&J, we have lots of preventative programs for diabetes. We are a patient-centric organization, which means we look to patients' needs in terms of the product and how it works, but we also conduct many educational activities regarding diabetes and how to live a healthier life. We connect to patients holistically to ensure that our service is what is expected by the patient and also for patients to accept our product. We can bring products back to R&D for improvement if it is necessary.

Can these test strips work in conjunction with J&J products in other areas?

Janssen Pharmaceuticals sales force works collaboratively with LifeScan and J&J Medical in marketing diabetes drug products and other diabetes care solutions.

How is that being focused in terms of personalized medicine?

From the glucose monitoring perspective, it would be much harder to personalize. Our strips do have a certain range of accuracy for readings, using a standardized calculation code that customers use when monitoring their glucose levels. We have tried to make it easier for the patient, but the strip and measuring the glucose level can be made more or less accurate, which differentiates our products over other companies' products.

How was LifeScan established in Puerto Rico?

LifeScan is the diabetes care segment of the Johnson and Johnson (J&J) family of companies. Our key decisions are always based on the J&J Credo and this impacts how we interact with our patients, customers, stockholders, nurses and doctors. LifeScan aims to take care of and provide the best quality of life for diabetes patients.

LifeScan Puerto Rico started in 1989 in a very small, second-floor space in San German with a limited number of people working as a packaging operation. As the company grew, we moved to Cabo Rojo into a facility and expanded the operation beyond packaging and into some steps of the conversion process. As LifeScan continued to grow, we moved into the current Aguadilla facility in 2008. Puerto Rico was one of 25 potential sites that competed for the entire manufacturing process of our OneTouch Ultra test strips, and the final decision was to move here to Aguadilla. This visibly demonstrates what the corporation saw in our people, infrastructure and environment. The move to Aguadilla further expanded the operation; we were not only doing just packaging and conversion processes, but an end-to-end process of the One Touch Ultra Plus strips. The Aguadilla facility does everything from receiving and manufacturing to packaging and shipping, with approximately 270 employees working here supplying the US market.

What are some of the competitive characteristics of this facility?

This building was designed to be a lean facility. It has a uni-directional flow, which means we begin our process with receiving until the product is taken from the facility at the other end. This single flow movement has greatly reduced our waste. The design of this facility is critical because it does not matter if we bring new products in; we would still be able to keep the design without disrupting that flow.

Talent is also a key component of our competitiveness. This is the third plant I have led in Puerto Rico, the others being J&J's facilities in San German and Manatí. Each of these plants has impressed me in different ways due to their capabilities and core competencies. However, when I arrived at LifeScan, I was very impressed by its talent. The technical capability of the workforce is outstanding. I was struck by the fact that much of the automation and manufacturing electronic systems were designed, built and installed here by our own engineers. Our employees support the design and installation of equipment when we need it. Once equipment is transferred to this site, the workforce has the knowledge required to manage the day-to-day operations.

Execution is also fundamental in terms of ensuring we make products with the right quality, caring about employee safety, and being cost-competitive. You have to meet or exceed targets in those three areas to be competitive within the site and the business. The mindset of continuous improvement is very much ingrained here. We have many Kaizen events throughout the year, belt certification, and FPX (flawless project execution) certification, a J&J methodology used to ensure success during the project execution. This makes the facility a place of choice in diabetes care.

Does this added knowledge help drive costs down in any way?

Building and maintaining those capabilities definitely helps us to be more cost-competitive. For example, manufacturing execution systems may cost about three times more by doing it with our own engineers. This expertise is a key selling point for any new product site selection within the Diabetes Solutions Franchise. The platform for this product is totally different but requires knowledge and expertise in automation and injection molding. LifeScan Puerto Rico as this expertise and will represent a key element in the decision-making process of the site selected to make that new product.

The added value of having several other J&J sites nearby must also factor into this decision-making process.

Indeed, it is not only about what we have in-house, but what we have in the J&J Puerto Rico campus as we work collaboratively, supporting each other. For example, Ethicon has expertise in clean rooms and Janssen has expertise in injectables, which we can freely use. In terms of project management, we can tap into any strength in the J&J Puerto Rico campus for anything required in a manufacturing facility, which we call "The Strength of One". Furthermore, our plants in the diabetes segment, have a collaboration forum where we share best practices and we benefit from what has been learned in Scotland or here in Puerto Rico. This keeps our sites competitive.

What does Puerto Rico's excellent education system offer in terms of talent?

For feeding talent, LifeScan has full access to Puerto Rico's universities. Aguadilla has one private and one public university. Both are good talent feeders for science and technology, which is readily available. UPR Mayagüez campus is relatively close to this facility and we collaborate with them too. We have public school students and professors who visit this facility. Our highly educated employees speak to students to open their minds up to the world of manufacturing, particularly in healthcare, where they realize they can have a successful career.

In what ways does LifeScan give back to the community?

Community is one of the other key aspects of the J&J Credo. The number of activities sponsored by this site is huge. Our Women's Leadership Initiative (WLI) is corporate-wide and instills growing women leaders. Our most well-known activity is the annual "Tour de Cure" race in Aguadilla, which we support to benefit the American Diabetes Association. Last year LifeScan brought in over \$100,000 from 2,000 participants. We have also been selected as the Best Employer in Puerto Rico two years in a row.

As this is the third plant you have managed in Puerto Rico, where do you see yourself going after your tenure here?

My career has been in the pharmaceutical industry. I have been in plants that make creams, contraceptives, liquids, tablets, patches. I know most of the technologies in the pharmaceutical and consumer world. In the world of MD&D, there are many opportunities where I can bring my expertise from the pharmaceutical business and share those experiences and learnings. I see myself staying in diabetes care for a few years. I always want to leave a legacy wherever I go, so I want to do the same for this division and then do something else beneficial for the J&J organization and for myself. In between plant leading roles I have also worked in corporate roles. I therefore have a well-rounded perspective in J&J, which has prepared me well for this current position. Those experiences have provided me with the tools for LifeScan to continue improving and excelling.

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