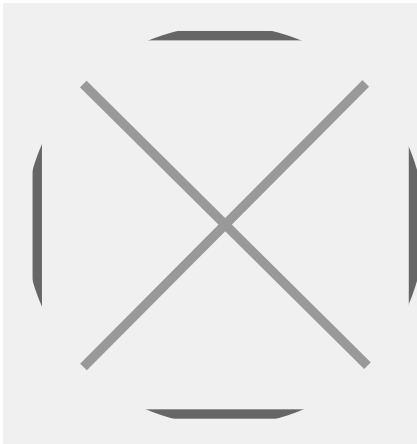


Interview: Michelle Lock - Biopharmaceutical Vice President & General Manager, Bristol Myers Squibb, Switzerland



"A critical component of working in pharmaceuticals is ensuring that patients can gain access to medicines. Patients remain at the center of what we are doing at BMS."

14.11.2016

Michelle Lock describes the positive challenges that come with expanding a biopharmaceutical business that possesses a well-regarded pipeline, and that continuously launches products across the Alpine region. She highlights the strategic importance of the region for Bristol Myers Squibb, and the increasing focus on securing market access.

What are the responsibilities for a vice president in biopharmaceuticals at BMS?

My primary responsibilities within BMS are three fold. The first is that I lead a cluster of countries known as the Alpine region, secondly I am heavily invested in talent development both within the Alpine region and across the broader organization; and lastly, I sit on the company's global leadership team consisting of the most senior leaders within the organization. Our responsibility is to make strategic decisions for the organization throughout all aspects of running the operational and strategic framework of the company.

On the BMS Global Leadership Team what is currently on the agenda, and what are the current hot topics for discussion at these meetings?

A critical component of working in pharmaceuticals is ensuring that patients can gain access to medicines. Patients remain at the center of what we are doing at BMS.

With changing demographics and increasing financial pressures on national governments, we discuss the global operating environment and consider how we can best support a broad array of countries. It is no longer sufficient to just have products approved by regulatory authorities, although this remains a critical step, well-designed access plans outlining a products' value are also needed for negotiations with reimbursement bodies. Therefore, to ensure patients can benefit from our products, there are many discussions surrounding the approval and access processes.

We also continuously review our philanthropic activities. As a biopharmaceutical company, we have a history, and a strong track record of providing philanthropic support across many disease areas such as HIV and Aids in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as increasing awareness about the importance of disease screening programs, such as skin cancers, lung cancers, etc. We also provide education on diabetes prevention to communities in need.

What are the business priorities of BMS right now?

[Featured_in]

Very transparently, BMS has been undergoing a process of specialization and consolidation over the past couple of decades. 20 years ago BMS sold hair products, baby food, and splints for broken legs. Since then we have divested many of these product lines and focused on our core business; Pharmaceuticals. More recently we have honed this even further to specifically target areas of high unmet medical needs for patients. We are now very highly regarded as specialists in the biopharmaceutical space.

When we look at reviews about BMS we see that it has one of the best pipelines in the industry. How does BMS maintain this reputation?

Unequivocally, BMS has a pipeline of which we can be very proud. What this means for upper level management is that we have to prepare for growth; in the last 18 months my countries have had 17 launches. . I have people that are highly agile, very skilled, and passionate about bringing medicines to people. We have learned over the past 18 months that the more times we launch medicines; the more passionate we are about it. It is amazing how people share what they have learned and continue to be inspired by the next opportunity in the pipeline.

How does BMS prepare for the growth? What do you prioritize?

We are very diligent about running a tight business and preparing for growth, but this can only be achieved with the right people. We prioritize and invest in the culture at BMS. In the regions that I run we have put an extraordinary effort into developing our people and culture. Knowing that three

years ago we were about to grow very quickly, we needed to first build an organization that was capable of many launches, and then we had to build the skillset of the people and ensure they remained motivated. We have invested a large amount in our employees, which has had very positive results. Recently the markets were recognized both internally and externally with awards for the culture across the Alpine region. In both Switzerland and Austria, we won the “great place to work” awards. Switzerland also won the best place for millennials to work out of any company in any industry. These awards are reflective of the efforts BMS puts behind growing and developing our people.

You have launched oncology drugs in several countries. Could you tell us a bit of the differences between running teams in these distinct markets?

I was a specialized nurse running a bone-marrow transplant unit before I joined the pharmaceutical industry, but that was a long time ago!

I am very proud to work in the pharmaceutical industry as we are able to help thousands of patients every day. During my career I have launched oncology drugs in Australia, Japan, South East Asia, UK, EU and the United States. Now, I am in the alpine region and I oversee teams launching new products and supporting inline brands. It does not matter what country we are in, if our employees are passionate about bringing the benefits to the patient, then we succeed in bringing the benefits. We need to continually speak to our customers to understand what they need, and then support them accordingly

There are many factors that are crucial in launching products, but key to our success is having a High Performing Team. I am a true believer that “one man can be good, but a team can be great”. Ensuring Market Access is well integrated into HPT’s is very important. We continue to need highly skilled health economics people, and highly skilled medical people who together can strategically pull together the medical data and speak to customers at a government level. The value proposition for every product is increasingly important.

[related_story]

You mentioned the value of innovation in Switzerland. Do you see BMS tapping into the R&D and innovation networks within Switzerland?

Several years ago we were not as integrated in Switzerland as we could have been. Recently we have put a large investment behind the R&D capabilities in Switzerland including adding additional people to support clinical trials within the region. And the result has been outstanding; Across BMS

the highest recruitment for oncology centers per capita of population has been in Switzerland. We have now transformed a number of centers for BMS's major focus areas with significant support provided by our HC teams. Switzerland is a phenomenally interesting country in terms of medicine, with some of the best thought leaders in the world. So the answer to the question is yes, we definitely are working with the innovation networks in Switzerland.

Within the region, where do you see your focus in the next few years?

For BMS it is extremely important that we continue to invest in our immuno-oncology platform. This platform has unequivocal benefits to the general population and revolutionizes the way that cancer is being treated. Given that, BMS will continue to make developments in bringing benefits to patients, and bring benefits to the healthcare providers using these products. We are also a specialty care company and we will continue to focus on rheumatoid arthritis, cardiovascular disease, HCV, and hepatitis-based diseases, and our portfolio of oncology outside of the immuno-oncology space.

When you speak about business development of BMS we see that 56 per cent of your revenues are still from the US and 21 per cent from Europe. Where do you see these numbers going in terms of business development?

Even before we speak about business development, BMS is at an interesting stage of evolution because Opdivo has been launched in the US for some time across multiple indications. In Europe and many countries, Opdivo has not yet been reimbursed or is on the cusp of being reimbursed. So we expect this financial situation and the percentages to organically change as Opdivo comes to market in large European markets.

In terms of business development, BMS looks at the development as a global opportunity, but given the number of launches we have just had, today our focus is on our product launches.

In a few years time, how are you going to measure your success at BMS?

From a business perspective, it is about launching products successfully, and fulfilling our commitments in bringing products to market. From a corporate perspective, it is about meeting the business objectives that are set out for me in terms of running a country and a cluster.

I measure my success from a personal perspective by the number of people I can develop from this experience. For me developing people means bringing junior people in and developing them into more senior levels, moving people with global ambitions into global organizations, bringing people from other countries into Switzerland and developing their talent, and expanding people's mindset

on how to develop a market. When we talk about market access, we are not talking about just pricing, but also about developing a value proposition that is meaningful to our customers. So my measurement for success is by the number of people that have grown and developed at BMS.

We notice that the pharmaceutical industry attracts initially a lot more women than other industries, but at the top it is primarily men. BMS encourages equality in the workforce, but where do you see the root of the problem?

This is not a problem that is unique to the pharmaceutical industry, and clearly BMS is supportive of women in executive management roles, as myself and a number of women hold senior, influential positions. I have also been a mentor to many women throughout my career and I see it that sometimes women self-select out of management roles, but also sometimes corporations are selecting them out of managerial positions. I encourage women to speak up about their accomplishments, and understand that the company hires people not just to do a project, but also to explain the project that they did at the end. I see a discrepancy in how women and men explain the work they have done, and I think this can be improved through coaching and mentorships.

What keeps you motivated?

I have worked in some environments and countries that have been challenging, but every morning when I wake up I believe in the benefits that we are bringing to patients and that we are doing the right thing. I also believe that healthcare should be accessible to everyone, and those of us that are passionate about healthcare have a wonderful opportunity to empower our society and organizations to bring healthcare to all people. This is what keeps me motivated.

[See more interviews](#)