

Interview: Sridhar Ranganathan - Managing Director, Allergan, India



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Sridhar Ranganathan, managing director of Allergan, explains how the affiliate revolutionized the ophthalmologic market in India and how it engages with the different stakeholders, ranging from government institutions to the Women Ophthalmologic Society to bring value to the country and help patients.

Can you give our international readers a brief introduction of your background in the pharmaceutical sector?

I have more than 25 years of experience in the Indian pharmaceutical market, while I also managed operations in neighboring countries like Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. I joined Allergan as a sales manager for South India in 1998, I moved up to marketing before heading the business units of aesthetics and ophthalmology. I became the Managing Director of the Indian affiliate in December last year.

The reason why I stayed with Allergan such a long time is because it is an organization that truly values people. Furthermore, it is a very scientific organization. If you take, for instance, any segment in which we operate, there is wide recognition across the country for the value that Allergan brings into millions of patients' lives. Another aspect of the company that I liked a lot is "at Allergan you do not run behind numbers, you run behind science."

Can you discuss the scope of activities of the Indian affiliate?

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We are an organization that supports medical fraternity with our in-depth studies and scientific innovations to improve their skills and medication of concerned diseases. For instance, if you take eye-care as a disease opportunity, we partner with the key institutions in the country to organize programs that increase knowledge and awareness about the disease and the most recent advancement towards the treatment of these diseases. Additionally, we provide support to medical practitioners with medical education on regular basis by bringing expertise from outside, which help them in better and precise diagnosis of the diseases with the aim of providing comprehensive solutions in terms of treatment options.

Despite being a multinational, Allergan is also a local organization in many aspects. For example, in many cases, we have been the second or third affiliate to launch global products locally after US / Europe. Not only does the global affiliate give us the permission to launch products at India specific prices but they also give us the freedom to identify local requirements and adapt our strategies locally. This is critical as India is a very peculiar pharmaceutical market and there are certain brands that are not available outside of the country and certain molecules that are very useful here. Today, 50 percent of our products are manufactured locally and are not available outside India and they are truly revolutionary products in India.

Larger part of our investments in India are dedicated to the promotion of non-branded scientific activities. For instance, we support a program titled 'Erudio' which is a unique program for postgraduates. It provides a great learning opportunity for residents across India and South Asia, where they not only test and prove their knowledge, but also enhance their knowledge through live debate on case studies, clearing doubts with senior and well accomplished ophthalmologists in various fields of ophthalmology. The finalists of the quiz are awarded with an opportunity to enhance their skills internationally by participating in selected international conference or seminar on ophthalmology. We also collaborate with some of the top ophthalmic societies and institutes to identify the best students and provide them with exposure to some of the experts in Ophthalmology.

If you compare Allergan India with other affiliates around the world, how would you assess the network that you have in the country?

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If you have a look at other affiliates in India, you would realize that the main reason why organizations would like to partner with Allergan is because of our scientific approach. We

participate in World Glaucoma Week every year which is a clear example of a dissemination of awareness program, by identifying 3000 to 4000 clinics across the country alongside running a week-long awareness programs. We are also active in activities related to diabetic retinopathy detection and we are officially associated with various bodies like the All India Ophthalmic Society, Glaucoma Society of India, Cornea Society of India and the Women Ophthalmologists Society in India. In the Neuroscience segment, we organize various impactful programs like the CP (Cerebral Palsy) Day.

What is the strategic importance of your partnership with Piramal and what kind of impact will it have on the affiliate's future?

It is a successful joint venture for more than two decades now. While they have a partnership in the marketing operations, they also manufacture products for us. The manufacturing of ophthalmic products is done as per the requirements and global standards of Allergan. We collaborate with their development team to identify the therapeutic gaps in the market.

How can Allergan's motto, 'growth pharma,' be implemented in India, given the rapidity with which the market is growing?

Opportunities are huge in India as it is an evolving market and there is an expansion in every disease area, especially in ophthalmology and even in aesthetics. I am sure you are aware that we have an aesthetics and Neurosciences units here, too. While Allergan India is made up of ophthalmology for the 85 percent, we have identified growth potential in aesthetics and Neurosciences. Essentially, we see opportunities in every therapeutic area in which we can bring innovation and provide solutions which are needed for many patients. Glaucoma is underdiagnosed and certain other areas like cornea have quite a few challenges. Allergan has products that can facilitate doctors to give better treatment for various diseases.

I was recently a speaker in Glaucoma Society of India conference in which we were looking at physicians-industry partnerships. Some claim that companies are happy as long as they find a new therapeutic area to invest in. This might not be necessarily the case as industry and physicians are working together to eradicate diseases like the way small pox is eradicated, for instance. If we can move in that direction it would be great.

You currently hold a 20 percent market share in the Indian ophthalmology market. What are the other areas in which Allergan can put its resources?

As I mentioned earlier, the aesthetics and Neurosciences segments and its expansion is our top priority. As I am sure you have realized, the desire to be young and beautiful is picking up on the Indians and we are currently in the process of assessing what are the opportunities to be captured here.

India catches people's attention because it is dynamic, diverse and big. However, it is also your job, as a managing director, to promote your country from a business perspective. How do you make a case for the local affiliate when you meet your peers around the world?

India is a land of opportunities and if you do business in the right way you can shape the market and grow significantly. This is what we did over the past 20 years. When we came to India both the ophthalmologist and aesthetics segments were very small and we created them the way they are today. Given that most of the intellectual scientific people are sitting here we would certainly want to carry their expertise to the other parts of the world too.

What would you like to tell the readers of PharmaBoardroom?

We articulate our team around the 'be bold' tagline. We want to eliminate bureaucracy and the global office gives a lot of freedom to country managers to execute tasks if they feel you are doing the right thing for the local market. We are very strong at driving values, too. Lastly, building bridges is very important to us - bridges between and across segments. We are a very attractive company for healthcare community and employees.

We have people coming to join us from many other multinationals because of the opportunities we give them. We have the highest engagement score in the APAC region in the last employee engagement survey. More importantly, we are an extremely dependable company for our patients because of our product portfolio, the quality our products carry and the value our products bring in their lives. I bet that if you ask doctors what would they choose if they must prescribe for their family members they will certainly quote an Allergan product. We have the reason to believe that Allergan can become the biggest and the most trusted foreign multinational in India.

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