

Interview: Paulo Teixeira - General Manager, Pfizer Portugal



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Paulo Teixeira shines a light on Pfizer's promising pipeline for 2018, the market access environment in Portugal and the clinical trial landscape. Teixeira intends to contribute to improving society's perception of the pharmaceutical industry and position Pfizer as a partner for health and wellbeing in Portugal; part of the solution—not the problem, in ensuring the sustainability of the healthcare system.

What are your priorities for this year?

For 2018 we face many challenges which present very positive opportunities for patients in Portugal. We have new launches underway and are currently on standby for a vital drug reimbursement review for rheumatoid arthritis, a first in class innovative medicine in oral form. Furthermore, we aim to secure reimbursement and appropriate funding for an innovative metastatic breast cancer treatment, making it available to a broader group of patients in need.

Protecting health at every stage of life through vaccination is a key priority. We have recently launched a vaccine against Meningitis B, building up our portfolio that includes prevention of other forms of meningitis and pneumococcal disease, in infants and adults. Finally, 2018 will be the year in which we reinforce our position in anti-infectives. This area is becoming an increasingly pressing concern in healthcare given the rise of antimicrobial resistance. Portugal has high rates of hospital infections due to MRSA, especially when compared to other European countries. The possibility of

launching new anti-infectives presents new therapeutic alternatives for patients and health care professionals in combating this serious public health concern.

What was your mandate when you took on the role in 2016?

I had three focus areas as I accepted the new role as Country Manager in summer 2016. Firstly, to improve access to our medicines and impact patients' lives. The country's leading issue in 2016, and to this day, is making sure that innovation gets to the right patients at the right time. In Portugal, the process is too lengthy – the average approval time can reach more than 1 year. Appropriate access to our medicines, and leadership in the therapeutic areas in which we operate, was, therefore, top of my priority list.

My second goal is linked to the role we have in society. We want Pfizer to be recognized as a valuable partner by healthcare authorities and stakeholders. Thirdly, I set out to work on bettering our distinctive organizational culture. Pfizer's culture is well-known and assists in attracting and retaining the best talent in the sector.

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How is Pfizer positioned in Portugal?

Pfizer is in the top five of leading companies in Portugal. Losses in exclusivity and constraints in market access coupled with active competition represent great challenges. Overall, Portugal is well positioned, and our critical concern is to deliver innovation to patients in need in our country. With an incredibly promising pipeline, we can be very confident to continue to succeed in the future.

What is your assessment of introducing risk-sharing agreements to improve the national healthcare system?

Before I answer the question, I would like to provide readers with some necessary context. During the economic and financial crisis, the Portuguese government made tough adjustments, most notably in the healthcare sector. Pharma companies committed to making one of the most significant contributions to the sustainability effort of the National Health Service. About 50 percent of adjustments in healthcare costs were achieved primarily through the value chain of medicines. The Ministry of Health recognizes, therefore, that we have always been an active player in seeking solutions, and making the system more sustainable to ensure that as much of the population as possible have access to the medicines they need.

Nonetheless, government continues to face great challenges year on year regarding health budget. In short, the budget is insufficient in covering immediate expenses; the system is systematically underfunded, which renders the entire process complex for funding innovation.

As a leading player in the pharmaceutical industry, we engage in constructive dialogue with health authorities, particularly Infarmed, and continually present solutions. Ultimately, it is a political decision. I must emphasize that Pfizer is always willing to take part in the solution seeking processes, including risk-sharing agreements. However, this has to involve, from both sides, flexibility and willingness to ensure tangible and the best outcomes for patients.

The challenge is to balance short-term pressing financial needs with the imperative of ensuring appropriate funding for innovation, bringing value to the system in the long run.

What is the Pfizer clinical trial footprint in Portugal?

Our footprint is smaller than we would hope. In the past, Portugal faced an inefficient legislative and regulatory framework and scarce infrastructures available to respond to the requirements involved in conducting clinical trials. The loss of competitiveness resulting from these challenges implies a process of confidence-building, in particular, and in our case, as a multinational, in an effort to demonstrate internationally that the country is once again in a position to be considered an attractive research pole in Europe.

We have 10 clinical trials ongoing in Portugal in therapeutic areas such as rare diseases, biosimilars, oncology and inflammation. Although additional 18 trials are already planned, we want to increase this number and the medical and economic value clinical trials bring to the country.

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What case do you make at headquarters to increase investment in clinical trials in Portugal?

To regain confidence of headquarters concerning clinical trials, we highlight the skills and capabilities of healthcare professionals and scientists in the country.

The new agency, the AICIB, (The Agency for Clinical Research and Biomedical Innovation) which for the moment only exists on paper, shows the increasing and future commitment to innovative agencies initiated by governments. It can be especially attractive to pharmaceutical companies considering that the primary goal of the agency is to promote R&D and clinical trials in particular. Such a mechanism, if well implemented, can have the positive effect of driving public investment

in R&D. Now begins the hard work, and bringing this plan to fruition, to ensure that Portugal is on the radar as clinical trials destination.

One of your three priorities on becoming Country Manager was to improve the perception of the pharmaceutical industry. What do you mean by this?

I'm convinced we can do much better in talking about us as an industry and of the tremendous benefits we bring to society. 73 percent of the improvement in life expectancy derives from innovative medicines. Also, pharmaceutical companies invest a significant percentage of revenues in R&D, knowing full well that only 8 percent of every Euro invested "will see the light of day". Despite the risk involved, we continue committed to R&D investments worldwide, pursuing our mission to provide the best medicines to patients across the globe. I often remind my colleagues of the pride that working in this industry should bring in us; we provide the cure to diseases, hope to families in times of struggle, and relief to patients who are suffering.

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