Cristina Campos – CPO Head and Country President, Novartis Portugal



We will fuel innovation in the next three years, as we expect to bring 11 new treatments to Portugal in our Pharma portfolio and several new molecules and indications in hematology and solid tumors

05.06.2018

Tags: Portugal, Novartis, Pharma, Market Access, Innovation, Strategy

Cristina Campos is well known on the Portuguese pharmaceutical circuit, directing the affiliate of market leader, Novartis, and holding a position as vice-president at APIFARMA, the Portuguese Pharmaceutical Association. In her second meeting with PharmaBoardroom, Campos discusses the Portuguese 'talent machine', an exciting new portfolio with incredibly strong launches on the way, the company's sustained commitment to innovation and the clinical trials landscape.

A new global CEO since February 2018, welcome develops in improving market access in Portugal, and a positive economic climate in Portugal. What are your current priorities for the Novartis affiliate in this encouraging environment?

The top two priorities for the Novartis affiliate in Portugal are guaranteeing access to transformative innovation and nurturing talent. As one of the pioneers of change in the healthcare sector, we have plenty of new solutions to bring to the market in Portugal. We are therefore kept busy working with key stakeholders, including government partners, authorities and healthcare professionals to ensure that we work towards finding solutions that enhance the sustainability of the national healthcare system, all the while focusing on guaranteeing the right level of innovation is made available to patients across Portugal.

I take great pride in focusing on culture and talent nurturing in Novartis. Novartis is currently enjoying an exciting cultural evolution; we have a new CEO, and personally, I get a lot of energy from the new drive towards change, and building, attracting and retaining the right talent in Novartis. I dedicate a lot of time to people management and to ensuring the people that work here can unleash their potential.

Novartis attracts people who know they are consistently adding value to society and seeks candidates that have a real sense of purpose. I have led the affiliate through a time of crisis as well—as the current more favorable climate—engaging employees to take their role further has often been a source of motivation for me.

How do your priorities translate into plans for 2018?

We want our innovation to continue to be accessible and available, and we set out to renegotiate our contracts on a short-term basis so that negotiations are transparent and in line with the most recent scientific data. Secondly, we want to provide assistance in resolving the debt issue we see in Portugal. We are currently enjoying an encouraging growth period and should reflect this position by rethinking public finance and debt issues. Thirdly, we need to continue our innovation machine beyond the pill: presenting solutions alone or in partnership with start-ups, companies, and authorities. For example, we launched a project in 2017 – Techcare – aiming to reimagine the future of healthcare leveraging our digital-based start-up ecosystem, to develop “beyond and around the pill” solutions that can revolutionize the healthcare space maximizing the value our medications bring to society, healthcare systems and patients.

How much of the Novartis portfolio is available in Portugal?

Commercially speaking, almost the entire Novartis portfolio is already approved and available in Portugal. We had a considerable backlog of medicines we wanted to bring to patients, and we take great pride in having made these available. Naturally, the process could have been quicker, but the mission of making transformative innovation available to patients is developing smoothly.

In the last five years, we have brought several products to the market. In pharma, we have delivered a total of 12 new products and/or indications since 2012. In oncology, we have brought 14 new treatments, indications and/or formulations. We will fuel innovation in the next three years, as we expect to bring 11 new treatments to Portugal in our Pharma portfolio and several new

molecules and indications in hematology and solid tumors. Our most exciting upcoming innovation is for migraine patients. The treatment is biologic medication that will help to prevent migraines, making the attacks less severe and reducing their frequency. Migraine, of course, has a high unmet medical need and is one of the prime causes of disability worldwide; and in Portugal, the impairment is even more aggressive. Further, there is little awareness about migraine, and myths surround the topic which we wish to overturn. Finally, in our six disease areas: respiratory, cardio metabolic, immunology & dermatology, rheumatology, neuroscience, ophthalmology, and in Oncology we have even more medications in the pipeline —a lot to keep us busy in coming years!

How is Novartis positioned in Portugal?

The Novartis Group is Number One in Portugal, and overall, we are in the Top Three for the core Novartis Innovative Medicines Division. We maintain a strong position and are encouraged by not only the ranking but our innovation power. We pilot many projects in many areas with Novartis, and we have the right ecosystem in Portugal for trying new models and approaches. Novartis Portugal is also seen globally as a talent machine; we export many talents and even the talents and capabilities that are not exported often contribute to projects beyond Portugal.

To what extent do you agree that Portugal is a slow market access country?

It is true that timelines are long in Portugal, especially when Novartis wants that our access contracts reflect transparent, scientific-based negotiations serving our population’s needs. There are additional challenges we face when we consider the long-term sustainability of the Portuguese healthcare system. The population is aging significantly, with some estimates saying that by 2050, more than 40 percent of the population will be above 60. Currently, we see a figure of 28 percent. We need to acknowledge the demographic pressure and plan accordingly in order to enable the right health care is provided to our population.

We see some improvements in PAPs—the Patient Access Programs—and the industry overall believes this could be a great access model, which allows for the free provision of medicines in a 210-day period. The tradeoff is that we have to guarantee that the drugs will be reimbursed in the designated timeframe. The industry considers this change as an opportunity, although there is no evidence of the effectiveness of this system as of yet.

Novartis is among the Top Five companies globally investing in R&D. Moreover, one way to bring innovation to patients is through clinical trials. What is the current R&D footprint for Novartis Portugal and how are you leading from the front?

In the past ten years, Novartis has completed 95 clinical trials in Portugal, involving more than 26,000 patients. Currently, we have 48 clinical trials underway, with over 530 patients enrolled, in over 170 centers of research across the country. We cover several disease areas, with high unmet medical needs. We are investing circa 5 million euros in R&D, and in the past five years, we have quadrupled our investments in R&D. Even during the crisis period Novartis managed to sustain their commitment to R&D, demonstrating that not only are we here for the short-term, but we intend to be a long-term, future-focused partner. This way, we believe Novartis is in a strong position for advocating for more investment or in engaging in more effective dialogue with the authorities.

Can Portugal become a hub for clinical trials?

Portugal has excellent potential for becoming a research and clinical trial destination, and our experience with the sites, investigators, and stakeholders has always been positive. What we need to improve upon as a country is the bureaucracy. We must increase approval times centrally and hospital by hospital to enhance competitiveness. After all, clinical trials are a competitive landscape; therefore, we must improve our agility. Regarding our skills as a nation, we are hard to beat concerning people, passion, experience, dedication, know-how, and patients available. Indeed, we have a fertile ecosystem for clinical trial development.

You recently said that there is no gender pay gap in Novartis, and Portugal is considered a future-focused, liberal country. What example can Novartis set for gender equality?

For Novartis, equality goes beyond gender. We are delighted that gender issues are a thing of the past in Novartis Portugal, and as such we use Portugal as an example and incentive to other countries. Within the Portuguese pharmaceutical sphere, Novartis can also act as a role model for diversity and inclusion in gender. However, Novartis intends to be a role model for other types of diversity: thinking styles, backgrounds, and generations and as such, we work on these levels of diversity so that we have equal opportunities from different areas, beyond gender.

Novartis headquarters is an attractive example of this diversity in action, where several women hold senior roles and leadership positions, to reflect society's progression in promoting people of all persuasions. Novartis can be an excellent example of gender equality, although we would like to be known for more than just gender equality as we also invest in promoting and treating all backgrounds equally.

How do accolades such as the recent award for having an excellent reputation in Portugal help the growth of the affiliate?

Novartis was recently distinguished with the award of best reputation in the pharma industry sector in Portugal. This award is a recognition of Novartis science based innovation and its capabilities and it reflects the value of our people in Portugal: reputation is built locally and what we do in the market. Further, being recognized with such awards proves that we are on the right track and creates an environment in which we can build and do more for our teams internally and the society we serve. Year on year, we see Novartis employees enjoying promotions from the Portuguese affiliate to positions in other countries and headquarters. Novartis Portugal is a great exporter of talents and we are also a great example of culture, reputation and innovation within the Novartis world.

See more interviews