

Interview: Silvia Guichardo - General Manager, GSK Portugal



"GSK Portugal wants to work in close collaboration with the authorities to maximize the number of patients treated with our innovative medicines and vaccines"

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Tags: [Portugal](#), [GSK](#), [Pharma](#), [Market Access](#), [Strategy](#)

Hailing from the Dominican Republic, Silvia Guichardo brings a fresh perspective as well as both US and Iberian experience to GSK Portugal. Six months into her role as general manager, Guichardo highlights GSK's historic commitment to Portuguese patients, new therapeutic areas for 2019, and the unsung importance of leading a varied and diverse career in pharmaceuticals.

What were your priorities when you took on the role in January 2018?

Priorities for the Portuguese affiliate align closely with the global priorities for GSK, that of striving to be one of the most innovative, best performing, and most trusted companies on the market and as such, we must fulfill this overall aspiration and vision for GSK. In practice, this translates into launching the next wave of innovation ensuring as many patients as possible can have access to our innovation while building trust in who we are and how we work.

GSK is a leader in HIV, respiratory, vaccines globally and we intend to continue driving progress in these areas in Portugal. Concerning respiratory, we will accelerate the **Ellipta**® portfolio and Nucala®. For our vaccines segment, we have especial focus on meningitis B and while we are delighted to see the level of vaccinations across newborns with our innovative vaccine Bexsero®, there is an opportunity to protect older children cohorts from this devastating disease. We hear much debate surrounding the sustainability of the healthcare system and GSK Portugal wants to work in close collaboration with the authorities to maximize the number of patients treated with

our innovative medicines and vaccines. We must continue to provide these in a transparent way and in an environment which inspires trust.

Finally, internal to our organization, we want to ensure that our employees are engaged and proud to work at GSK. Personally, I intend to continue the strong GSK legacy on employee engagement.

How is GSK performing in Portugal?

We cannot complain about our performance in Portugal. Historically we have a good track record in Portugal, and 2018 is no different. Growth is driven by our innovative products. We are also preparing the next wave of innovation in respiratory and the -re-entry into oncology. Our oncology offering is on the cusp of entering its research stages, and we expect patients to be able to access this innovation in the next couple of years.

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We live in a complicated challenging era in the industry, and if companies do not bring innovation into the hands of the patients quickly and efficiently — while putting patients at the center of the conversation and through collaboration with authorities — then it will be tough for the industry to continue to grow.

Concerning our positioning in the market, GSK is a top 10 company in Portugal, we have consistently showcased our commitment to the market through an evolution of products, and our pharmaceutical arm of operations alone employs over 100 people.

What are your first impressions of the market access environment in Portugal?

Portugal is an intriguing marketplace because it is simultaneously recognized as being one of the best healthcare systems in Europe while paradoxically facing significant challenges in access to innovation, primarily due to the chronic underfunding we observe of the healthcare system which causes delays to patient access. If we compare Portugal's patient access to innovation to the rest of Europe, we can see that the time (in days) from approval to patient access varies widely; in Germany for example can take up to 100 days while in Italy and Spain can take around 375 days, but for Portugal can be over 600 days. It is therefore critical to work alongside all stakeholders including authorities to ensure that innovation reaches the population.

How do you intend to make your pipeline accessible to Portuguese patients in the future?

At GSK, we are fully committed to bringing differentiated products that add value to the population. The next wave of products intends to address unmet medical needs in therapeutic areas that most affect the Portuguese population in the respiratory segment, the mortality rate in Portugal is relatively higher vs. the rate in the European Union,

Therefore, there is a need to bring in medications that can fulfill urgent unmet medical needs in this segment. With our Trelegy® product, we have seen, for example, an unprecedented exacerbation reduction.

We expect Trelegy® to be available in early 2019 once we receive reimbursement approval. Further, we have oncology medicines in the clinic; one of which is in its advanced stage — for relapsed refractory multiple myeloma — the timeframe for this medicine is for 2020. We know that the authorities are making their best efforts to accelerate drug approval rates, especially given the new system (SINATS/CATS) recently put in place. It remains to be seen whether this will pay out but the intention of reducing the approval times is there.

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How do you advocate for investment in Portugal faced with these challenges?

The onus is on the affiliate to educate the broader organization about the opportunities that exists in Portugal, how the healthcare system is evolving; what the authorities are doing to improve their current course, and how as an industry we can continue to add value with our innovation and contribute to the wellbeing of patients.

In this regard, one of my goals is to increase our R&D footprint in Portugal. We have some local clinical trials for some of our commercialized products and Trelegy®. With the arrival of the oncology portfolio, in 2020, and given the various Centers for Excellency in Portugal, this represent an investment opportunity that we will explore.

What role can the government play in attracting more investment for clinical trials?

Portugal is in a unique position given its economic revival which is impressive given that the economy was in contraction merely five years ago. If the government/authorities could articulate the improvement of the economy and address the chronic underfunding of the healthcare system, then there may be a compelling case for increasing clinical trial investment.

As a first-time general manager, Portugal is a unique testing ground. On one end you have one of the best healthcare systems in Europe with a of excellence in R&D, but threaten by chronic

underfunding, so the possibility is there, but it will require a strong commitment to improve the sustainability of the healthcare system.

To what extent can GSK lead the way in promoting diversity in the workplace?

For GSK Inclusion and Diversity (I&D) are a priority as we aim to create a working environment where all employees feel included, respected and valued for the unique qualities they bring, and are empowered to contribute to their full potential. Therefore, this is part of my agenda as we want to continue welcoming and promoting diverse backgrounds and perspectives.

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