

Francisco del Val, Country Manager, Sanofi Portugal



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Francisco del Val, recently nominated general manager of the business unit Sanofi Genzyme and country head of Sanofi Portugal, has two decades' experience in the pharma industry. In his first interview in Portugal, Francisco shares with us his priorities and his vision, highlighting the importance of diversification, and innovation through Sanofi's exciting new pipeline.

What are your priorities for the role?

Firstly, I am excited with the opportunity to take on this the new role in a new country. This is a great chance for professional and personal development. I know that there are a lot of challenges ahead of us but on the other side I already know part of the team given my past experience working for Sanofi Genzyme and Iberian operations and I'm quite familiar with Portuguese working culture.

My priorities in Portugal are to increase the knowledge and reputation of the Sanofi brand, establish partnerships with our stakeholders and work with all health players to contribute to the sustainability of Portuguese healthcare system. But our ambition is also to increase the access of patients to our products and bring innovation and attract investigation for the country. Last but not least a strong focus in our people including attract and retain talent for the organization either national or international.

How has your experience working for Sanofi Genzyme equipped you for the role here?

I have been working in the rare diseases segment for over two decades now. During this journey I have developed a real patient focus; patients are always in my mindset and they motivate me on a daily basis. In rare diseases, patients are the focus of all the work we do, and working in this area gives us a special feeling. I often say to the team that we bring hope to our patients but also to their family, caregivers and friends.

For example, pediatric diseases can be the most impacting as diagnosis can flip a family's world upside down. So I'm proud to say that Sanofi not only provides medicines but also support in terms of education, awareness and helps to find solutions, having the patient at the center of mission.

Over my time I have observed the pharmaceutical industry waking up to the importance of rare diseases. Personally, offering treatments to patients and alleviating families' pain brings a tremendous sense of satisfaction. This applies transversally to all the diversified areas in which Sanofi operates.

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

The market in Portugal is not very different from other Southern European countries and, from my experience, we can learn from other countries. This is one of the most important topics currently being discussed, and obviously applies to Portugal.

We observe a huge debate on the sustainability of the healthcare system, and particularly in the Mediterranean healthcare models. It's essential to all our stakeholders and for the industry and we all must coordinate our efforts, reinforce the exchange of information on common areas of interest, share best practices and find solutions to provide a sustainable and equitable healthcare service to citizens.

Sanofi is well aware that the government makes an effort to promote and improve the environment.

We must seek a common ground between stakeholders and pave the way of sustainability.

How do you advocate for more investment to Portugal?

Portugal is an attractive investment destination in many areas particularly in pharmaceuticals. Even though it is a country facing market access hurdles there are several opportunities to pursue. Firstly, people in Portugal are highly skilled and are open minded. If we refer to Sanofi clearly I would like to advocate more investment in the area of R&D.

What is the clinical trials' footprint of Sanofi in Portugal?

Sanofi has an innovative and robust pipeline that we expect to support the company for the long term growth. The company's pipeline spans 71 R&D projects, which includes 37 new molecular entities (NMEs) and novel vaccines as well as 34 additional indications.

We have been putting in place a new R&D model leveraging new proprietary technology platforms, multi targeting molecules and biologics. A new wave of clinical studies in many therapeutic areas is ongoing: immunology, rare diseases, obesity, diabetes, oncology, multiple sclerosis and cardiovascular diseases.

Regarding Portugal we are extremely proud to say that Sanofi have been doing a tremendous work to attract investigation to Portugal and the numbers speak for themselves. Let's see! Our affiliate tripled its activity in R&D in last 3 years: going from 8 studies in 2015 to 18 in 2018 and we have also increased the team.

Five clinical studies have just been introduced in the first semester of this year.

So, right now, we're conducting 18 clinical trials in both phase II and III in hospitals in several other therapeutic areas: Rare Diseases (polycystic renal disease, Pompe disease, Niemann Pick disease), Respiratory (nasal polyposis, idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis), Oncology (multiple myeloma and breast cancer), Neurology (multiple sclerosis and Parkinson), immunology/Rheumatology, metabolic diseases / cardiovascular. Two of these studies are in Pediatrics (neurology and multiple sclerosis).

This impacts more than 140 Portuguese researchers, in 30 hospitals and allows treating an average of 200 patients per year.

In the future we foresee to increase the number of studies in the areas of Oncology (as we are a reference country to conduct studies in this area) and in Diabetes. Currently Sanofi has an investment of 1.5 million euros in R&D.

But we are also striving to establish partnerships with Portuguese organizations to conduct investigation for Sanofi globally. A great example is the case of a recent agreement that we have just signed with iBET, a private not for profit research intensive SME in the area of biotechnology and life sciences. iBET will host a satellite laboratory for Sanofi and will lead 2 projects to improve Sanofi's biomanufacturing processes.

What do you do to attract and retain the best talent?

Sanofi is already a reference as an employer offering a stimulating working environment. We offer an attractive project to attract and retain talent at Sanofi. As a leading company, Sanofi offers the opportunity to work with an exciting pipeline. Our diversification is one of the key assets of the company and further serves to attract and retain talent at Sanofi.

Also, we are fully compromised in promoting a positive Sanofi culture in which we all are proud and committed in our mission to empower our people to achieve their goals and have a positive work-life balance. This is an extremely competitive comparative advantage.

Turnover of staff is very low at Sanofi and we often attract talent from companies in Portugal and across the globe.

During my 20 years in Sanofi I had the opportunity to develop myself both professionally and personally. Overall, I come to work every day happy and highly motivated by our contribution to the society.

Where do you see Sanofi in five years' time?

I see Sanofi as a leading and sustainable affiliate and one of the best companies to work. This is quite ambitious but we have main ingredients to achieve it: portfolio, strategy and our people. We're looking to launch innovative products that we currently have under investigation or registration. We are entering the hematology and hemophilia areas and we look to incorporate these new products into our portfolio and provide access to patients and healthcare professionals.

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