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Fernando Álvarez, director general of Allergan Iberia, highlights the market's shift towards more holistic innovation and the company's main growth drivers, especially in the field of aesthetics. Furthermore, he touches on the importance of the market access team in the fragmented Spanish healthcare ecosystem and his ambitions for Allergan throughout the region in the future.

This is the first time you have taken up a general manager position. How have the last two years in this role been for yourself?

Before taking up the general manager position, I was the business unit director for Allergan's ophthalmology division in Portugal and Spain for three years. This gave me the opportunity to better understand the company's culture and the way in which operations are performed at Allergan. This is key to understanding the best way to manage the entire Iberian Peninsula team.

The first real change I found was the changing of my mindset. In the past, if there was an issue it was the logical step for me to discuss the challenge with a member of Allergan in the country. Now, rather than requiring support, I am the one giving it to my team members. Furthermore, previously my primary focus was specifically on ophthalmology. Today, I must have complete visibility of the entire organization and therapeutic areas and understand the best way to deliver focus and support.

Despite the period being challenging, it has thus far been a unique and enjoyable experience that has required me to learn quickly on the job and use all my prior knowledge, working from sales rep to this general manager role, to adapt quickly and effectively.

What key market trends have you witnessed over the last few years?

The need for innovative products in the market has shifted. In today's market, products must be more sophisticated and encompass a larger spread of requirements, not only the needs of the doctors,but equally of the system and patients. This is due to the fact healthcare environments across Europe are looking more towards the idea of sustainability; therefore, efficiency must work alongside results, not just one or the other.

Secondly, Spain has 17 autonomous communities that have their own healthcare system. Therefore, we must adapt a tailored approach to deal with key stakeholders in each region. We notice that the needs of the health authorities and patients change, so then we must also adapt how we discuss with the relevant personnel. This issue links to the first trend of innovation, as if we are able to encompass within a product the needs of more people within the market, this will help when dealing with authorities.

How is the company's portfolio adapted for the Spanish market?

We are working in four key areas. Firstly, ophthalmology, and this can be split into three sections – dry eye syndrome, glaucoma and retinal pathologies.

Secondly, medical aesthetics, and this is divided into a range of products that relate to the aesthetic management of a person. Allergan is the unique company that covers the entire body, from facial aspects to body contouring, with non-invasive or minimally invasive treatments.

The final two areas fall under specialty care, and they are gastroenterology and neurology, with the latter utilizing Botox. It is a challenge to manage as most people associate this drug with aesthetic care, but it really covers a wide range of indications, including chronic migraine and spasticity and movement disorders.

Overall, we aim to be market leaders in all these four areas, and thus far we are achieving this objective.

Which areas do you see most growth?

We are focused heavily on what we call “needle movers”. In ophthalmology we are driven by our star product, Ozurdex®, which is used to treat retina swelling caused by conditions such as diabetic macular edema (DME). In neurology, the key product is Botox®. We are working closely with neurologists and rehabilitation specialists within this therapeutic group as the situation for patients with chronic migraine has a huge impact on them and society in general.

Finally, our medical aesthetics branch. This is important as it is an area that brings a lot of innovation and new products each and every year. Botox® and fillers are our historic products, though now we also have introduced CoolSculpting®, a way of reducing stubborn fat without any surgical intervention thanks to the technique of the cryolipolysis

Brent Saunders, Allergan CEO, is quite active in the market looking for opportunities. How quickly do the actions at a global level trickle down and effect Allergan Spain?

Allergan was historically split into two groups; USA and International. Previously, both were quite separate, though today any action taken for the US has the international market in mind, resulting in global decisions quickly impacting on what we do at Allergan Spain. This is especially true in the aesthetic medicine branch as it is quite an open market and innovation can be introduced relatively quickly.

What is the importance of the Iberian peninsula for Allergan?

Our expectations for the region are extremely high. A few years ago, we were able to win a CEO award as managing the most dynamic market within Allergan’s international division. We have been able to achieve double digit growth every year, which is not normal for a country within the EU-5. This has been done by having good growth through both mature products and needle movers. We see that the Spanish market potential is increasing, and we hope to take advantage of this in the future.

Many members of the Spanish pharmaceutical ecosystem talk about the fragmented ecosystem of the country. What have you done to be so effective in this environment?

Allergan is currently going through a transformation period and we are working hard to build our market access capabilities. In the last year, we have looked hard to discover the major needs of key stakeholders in the system, so in the future, we can meet these needs and generate results. To do this, we are building and developing our market access team and placing them within markets that are similar, so they can work in more than one state, rather than having 17 separate teams for each of Spain's autonomous communities.

What we have noticed is that we must develop strategies focused on improving patients' quality of life. That's why we have strategies to collaborate with healthcare authorities to improve early diagnosis for example or put forward documents such as pharmacoeconomic reports that look at economic impact, as well as the optimization of care processes related to Allergan therapeutic areas. But if we are not focused on what we do around patients and the patient's journey we will not meet the needs of the system.

For instance, we are in close collaboration in Andalusia with la ONCE, (National Organization of the Spanish Blind and other Disabilities). We partner with them to help in the development of prevention strategies, so diagnosis can be made prior to the current situation. An example is the last social project called 'Diabetic Macular Edema: Social Determinants of Health, Quality of Life and Main Drivers of Social Costs in the Spanish Population'.

In the case of migraines, we see that the prevalence is quite high, and it is hard to meet patient demands. Therefore, we partner with key stakeholders to develop protocols, allowing a better flow of patients through the system and hospitals.

Overall, we have collaborated in 45 projects with more than 3,000 stakeholders involved.

How does Allergan in the future continue to achieve double-digit growth and its strong market position?

Firstly, thanks to new products. Globally we have important treatments in the portfolio and more than 50 innovative products in the pipeline that we will look to bring to Spain. This is backed by the company's open science approach that promotes innovation coming both from internal and external sources.

Secondly, our vision must be humanistic. If we talk about how this applies to patients, we must identify their needs and provide solutions that improve their lives. Once we do this, then the products will be part of the solution. Another step in this patient centricity approach is partnering with the key stakeholders to understand also how to meet their requirements. To do that, we count on the best HCP training curriculum in the industry, the Allergan Medical Institute (AMI). This commitment helps ensure optimal consultation and treatment for patients.

Where will we see Allergan Spain in five-years time?

Out company CEO, Brent Saunders, is very dynamic and always looking for new opportunities. Therefore, I forecast an interesting future ahead with new products in our key areas of gastroenterology, neurology, aesthetic medicines and ophthalmology. Additionally, we may also enter new therapeutic areas as we have seen a lot of action recently in the company's portfolio range. It is possible thanks to the aforementioned open science philosophy, which is focused on new internal and external opportunities to develop.

You have been very successful in your period managing Allergan Portugal and Spain. What is your management style to drive forward your team?

It is challenging to explain what makes a leader, as many people have this naturally. Nevertheless, I believe it is key to be transparent with my team, so they always know what to expect and what my expectations or those of the company. This honest company approach is one side of the coin, while the other is keeping processes simple and making sure that staff members always feel my support and the possibility to develop skills and careers.

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