

Leobardo Hidalgo - General Manager, BMS Puerto Rico



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Leobardo Hidalgo, who lived in Puerto Rico as a child, recently came back to the island to head commercial operations at the local BMS affiliate, which has been performing remarkably well. He highlights a portfolio of transformational medicines matched with the local team's patient-centric approach and knowledge of the ecosystem as the key driver behind this performance. Now the affiliate is gearing up for upcoming product launches. In addition to commercial activities, he also breaks down the firm's manufacturing and clinical footprint on the island, which contributes to fostering the next generation of Puerto Rican talent in the pharma sector.

Could you give us an overview of BMS operations in Puerto Rico?

BMS has been operating in Puerto Rico for over 50 years. Over this time, our presence has grown to include commercial, manufacturing and clinical operations. Altogether, we currently employ around 950 people across our commercial site in Guaynabo, our manufacturing site in Humacao and our biomanufacturing site in Manatí. From our commercial site in Puerto Rico, we also manage the Caribbean region.

In terms of manufacturing, the majority of our best-selling drugs in Oncology, Immunology and Cardiovascular are actually made in Puerto Rico and we feel proud to call them *Boricuas*. Eliquis, one of the most prescribed drugs for stroke prevention in atrial fibrillation around the world, is manufactured in our Humacao site. Our biopharmaceutical facility in Manatí manufactures Opdivo,

Yervoy and Orencia. The products produced on the island are distributed to 61 markets globally.

You took the helm of commercial operations in Puerto Rico for BMS only five months ago. What did you find as the most surprising aspects of the Puerto Rican healthcare landscape and what have been your priorities since taking over?

Puerto Rico is quite a unique market. It operates within a similar environment as the US healthcare system, both in terms of regulatory framework and payer composition, yet our infrastructure is different and our providers do not behave the same as their mainland counterparts. Though there are significant differences in approach, the goal of everyone is to help patients. My priority has been to understand the intricacies of this balance and how can BMS collaborate within the system to achieve the shared objective of improving the health of patients.

I also spend a good portion of my time with the team. BMS Puerto Rico has been extremely successful in recent years. We are the fastest growing company among the top ten pharma companies in the Island, with a market evolution index of 112 points in the last 12 months. I want to peek under the hood to distil what the local team is doing to drive these outstanding results and continue developing these best practices.

What have you found out looking under the hood?

I think our team here has found true north when it comes to our approach to help patients with serious diseases. They do not think of patients as an abstract concept, but as people close to them, as their next of kin, which promotes deeper insight in *what* and *how* we deliver to them. In addition to relating with patients on a deeply empathic level, our team is extremely savvy about the local environment and have established relationships with the key health stakeholders.

What are the products driving the outstanding performance of the affiliate?

We focus strategically on three franchises, Oncology, both solid tumours and hematologic tumours, Immunology and Cardiovascular. All franchises have been performing tremendously well, but to highlight an example, Eliquis has surpassed warfarin in patient initiations and is close to becoming the number one prescribed oral anti-coagulant in Puerto Rico. Opdivo and Orencia have similar leading positions in their respective markets.

You have extensive market access experience across international markets, in particular for Orencia and Eliquis. How can you leverage these experiences to drive the success of the affiliate?

The advantage of working across diverse systems is that you develop an ability to identify their constants and particularities by comparing and contrasting them. I find that in Puerto Rico, we have the opportunity to leverage the US learnings and infrastructure when engaging in areas that are consistent across markets, yet quickly identify the local specific needs that require a local strategy.

What are the main growth opportunities you want to focus on moving forward?

As I said, we have established a strong position in Puerto Rico thanks to the outstanding team that has driven growth from our current portfolio.

Going forward, the potential acquisition of Celgene, which has recently been cleared by the European Commission but is still pending regulatory approval in the US, will bring a wealth of experience as well as a strong portfolio and pipeline of products. In the short-term, we expect six potential product launches in the next year or so, depending on how things progress. Coming from a relatively quiet launch period since 2018, we are gearing back into launch mode, which is a lot of fun!

You mentioned BMS also conducts clinical trial operations on the island. What is the extent of your clinical trial footprint?

We have 19 ongoing clinical trials in seven sites on the island focused on haematology, oncology, anti-coagulation and psoriasis. We are convinced this is an area where we can make a significant difference from Puerto Rico, as the Hispanic population has been historically underrepresented in clinical trials, which not only limits the generalizability of results, but also the ability of Hispanic patients to access potentially life-saving innovations in development. Our aim is to continue to grow this presence.

What do you see as the role of pharma companies like BMS in fostering talent in the Puerto Rican pharma sector and supporting the economic sustainability of the island?

Our industry has been instrumental to foster Puerto Rican talent and economic growth. With commercial, manufacturing and clinical operations, BMS has a footprint of 950 high-quality jobs for business, manufacturing and scientific professionals to develop in the island. We have partnerships with universities to strengthen the education and training of up-and-coming business, engineering and science leaders. Some of the amazing talents who start here go on to have successful careers on the mainland and internationally and many of them come back, bringing a breadth of experience and new perspectives, adding value to the local ecosystem.

On an institutional basis, in 2017, our organization invested hundreds of millions with local vendors in a wide range of business segments and paid hundreds of millions in Puerto Rican taxes. Think of this as the impact of a single entity within the pharmaceutical industry and you gain perspective on the relevance of our industry for the Island.

You have been working with BMS for the last 14 years. What makes you so dedicated to this company?

There are three things that I admire about BMS and make me proud to work here. We are authentically working for patients, I have seen how, even in tough times, we consistently make decisions with patients interests at centre. We have an unwavering ethical compass at the core of everything we do, and I work alongside brilliant and passionate colleagues. I feel incredibly fortunate to be part of an organization that harnesses all this brainpower, passion and ethics to help patients prevail against serious diseases.

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