

# Charil Pabón - Owner & President, Pharma Consulting Corporation (PCC), Puerto Rico

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*bón, Owner & President of Pharma Consulting Corporation (PCC), explains how the decreasing demand for validation services in Puerto Rico prompted the company to expand in new business areas such as the design and installation of laboratory, where PCC is now market leader, as well as enter new markets in Latin America. The company has also become a partner of choice for the nascent medical cannabis industry in Puerto Rico on regulatory compliance issues.*

## **Could you start by introducing PCC to our international readers?**

Pharma Consulting Corp was founded in 2003 by me and my brother Eric. I run the company with my husband Julio Ayala. We spent about three years working purely in validation solutions for pharmaceutical companies. Afterwards, we expanded the business into various areas, including the design and installation of laboratory furniture.

Our sales are mainly to multinational companies in Puerto Rico and now we are broadening our services to more countries in Latin America and Central America. We have already carried out projects in Costa Rica, Brazil, Bermuda, the Dominican Republic, and Mexico, among others.

## **How have the needs of pharma manufacturers evolved when it comes to validation?**

In our early years, from 2000 until 2008, the demand for validation services was very high, therefore we hired many consultants. After 2008, companies in Puerto Rico were unable to offer the same level of pay as other regions, and therefore many of these consultants moved abroad.

For any company working in validation services, there is a need to diversify as it is difficult to maintain a profitable business only offering these services. For us, that meant specializing in computer systems and developing our laboratory furniture arm.

## **How do you ensure you attract, develop and retain the right talent?**

Puerto Rico has excellent universities with a very good level in subjects such as chemical engineering, automation, and mechanics so when our students graduate, they are well prepared.

Additionally, Puerto Rican universities organize internships with pharmaceutical companies. However, many larger firms are reluctant to hire recent graduates due to their lack of experience. PCC, on the other hand, is happy to hire fresh young graduates because they bring new knowledge and skills to the workplace and can handle new technology and systems very well.

In last years, we have recruited more than 100 workers. Most of them are young people who, after working with us, are already running pharmaceutical plants here in Puerto Rico, in Florida or elsewhere.

I always tell them that I am going to help them and in return, they will provide me with their knowledge. They are very dynamic; they always want to do things and take the initiative.

We have just started negotiations for a new project and there are 35-50 new professionals working on it, but this is only the beginning, when they finally grant us the project, the number may vary. We are collaborating with engineering companies to improve facilities in a water pipe system in the country. The project consists of building the structure and designing the laboratories necessary to analyze the water that reaches each structure. Our part is that the laboratories are in full compliance with the regulations required.

Large companies usually don't hire young people without experience and if they do, they retain them through strict time clauses. At PCC, we help them to start in a laboratory and get some

exposure in the field without being tied down by clauses. They stay with us some time and then, whenever they want to, leave the company. In some cases, when they are later running a company, they provide us with contracts because they remember that I was the person who gave them their first opportunity.

**Why is there no competition in the creation and manufacture of laboratory furniture here in Puerto Rico?**

There is some competition in the market, but these companies are very small. When a pharmaceutical company requires lab furniture that conforms to strict regulations, often they are unable to compete. At PCC, we meet all compliance standards, making us the market leader.

Another important point is that in Puerto Rico, there is a law that promotes businesses run by women, which also gives us an advantage.

**You have recently expanded your services to medicinal cannabis manufacturers, a nascent industry in Puerto Rico which has seen investment with companies such as NextGen Pharma. How are you helping the industry with your expertise?**

We help them to act in accordance with the laws because they must have certain certifications even if the government does not apply the same regulation. For example, we have provided guidance to eleven laboratories on federal policies and regulations. Additionally, we have worked on designs for their Cannabis sales stores.

**Even though medical cannabis has been legal since 2015, the industry is still facing operational, banking and regulatory challenges. How do these challenges affect you as a service provider?**

Since we are a service provider and not a manufacturer, changes to the banking system do not affect us. However, the same does not happen for other companies that have to face new challenges and go to certain banks.

**How did you identify the opportunity around medical cannabis?**

When medical cannabis was legalized in Puerto Rico in 2015, I began to visit town halls and other institutions, asking questions and educating myself about regulations, policies, and laws. I realized that companies operating in this new space were not necessarily aware of the regulatory requirements around medical cannabis and that we could offer guidance to help them be more prepared and avoid any negligence.

### **What does your typical client look like?**

We usually work with all types of customers. Small “boutique” companies for Cannabis, making laboratory designs for universities, hospitals, pharmaceuticals. However, the most recognized multinationals are those that keep us busy and have helped us grow in both divisions.

### **What are your expectations for PCC for the next five years?**

What are your expectations for PCC for the next five years? We are currently operating mainly in Latin America. I would like to continue working in this region and help improve the level of employment in my country. Every year, many students go to other countries to work, therefore, my goal is to help build a country that has numerous employment opportunities and encourage young talents to remain in Puerto Rico and for the economy to improve.

### **What advice would you give your entrepreneurial partners?**

Women need to believe in gender equality. We tend to think that a woman can only work in delicate trades, but this is not true. We need to believe in ourselves and see that we can work in the field and that we can perform as well as men. We need to get rid of these stereotypes to achieve our goals. We are intelligent and able to achieve any goal we set ourselves.

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