Giuseppe Allocca – Site Leader Vega Baja & Barceloneta Operations, Pfizer Global Supply, Puerto Rico



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Pfizer's site leader for its Vega Baja & Barceloneta operations in Puerto Rico, highlights the importance of Pfizer's manufacturing operations on the island, with 14 of the company's key products manufactured there.

After spending the first part of your career in Italy, at the Pfizer site in Ascoli, three years ago you came to Puerto Rico. What was your motivation to take on this opportunity in a very challenging environment?

After more than 16 years at Ascoli, I was offered the opportunity to come to Puerto Rico to lead the production plant at Vega Baja and later, Barceloneta. Personally, I saw this as a great opportunity, since Puerto Rico is one of the leading countries in pharmaceutical manufacturing, so working here would significantly enrich my experience and professional background. Together with the perspective Puerto Rico and its diversified culture offers to my family, I took the decision with my wife and my two children to move here.

What has been your key priority since leading the two sites here in Puerto Rico?

Keeping in mind that the patient is in the centre of everything we do, our main priority is the delivery of our value proposition, which at Pfizer is based on high product quality, a reliable supply chain and affordable cost. All these three elements include an element of sustainability, which we see as a crucial element here at our plants. For instance, we have installed solar panels at our site in Vega Baja to increase the self-sufficiency of our operations.

Knowing other manufacturing locations, especially in Europe, from personal experience, what would you highlight as the competitive advantage of Puerto Rico compared to other manufacturing hubs around the world?

The main competitive advantage I see in Puerto Rico is the people working in the pharmaceutical sector, both in terms of competence and passion. The engagement the workforce here has with the industry is unique and is complemented by the knowledge exists on the island, through more than 50 years of pharmaceutical manufacturing experience and excellent training institutions. While other manufacturing hubs around the world do have the similar advantages, it is mostly the passion and dedication professionals put into their work in the industry here, that makes Puerto Rico an attractive destination for pharmaceutical manufacturing.

Pfizer’s Puerto Rico operations have been subject to many discussions due to consolidation and global manufacturing restructuring, so can you give our international readers an update over the current footprint of Pfizer on the island?

Today, Pfizer has two manufacturing facilities in Puerto Rico, in Vega Baja and Barceloneta, which are both under my responsibility. These two facilities are specialized in solid dosage manufacturing and supply 14 iconic brands of Pfizer, which are still key products today. The operations in Puerto Rico are a huge part of Pfizer’s supply chain, as our operations here cover every area from API manufacturing to packaging. We are not only producing for the US market but between 60 and 70 percent of our volume is exported globally.

Given the importance of Puerto Rico, how do you ensure that drug supply is not interrupted?

The supply reliability and GMP compliance are undoubtedly the rules of the game, as this ensures that no issues are rising during regular production. The site in Vega Baja has a stellar supply chain performance and we are very proud of this achievement. One the other hand, business contingency plans are necessary, as Puerto Rico is located in a hurricane region. We have worked a lot in this area and even after Hurricane Maria, we resumed operations 41 days after. This would have not been possible without the support of our employees, suppliers, contractors and service providers, which were even at the gate the day after the storm hit us and showed great dedication, passion and pride to aid the recovery. We had a great emergency and business continuity plan, but as it is always the case in scenarios like these, we found things that we can improve in our system. We were prepared, but today we are even better prepared. This goes beyond the fence of our plants, as we also improved our communication and plans with suppliers and government agencies. The event really brought alive our mission of transforming lives, building future – every day, every dose, every shift.

Having a wealth of experience in manufacturing operations management, which are trends and disruptions you see shaping the pharmaceutical manufacturing industry in the next few years?

I see flexible automation as one of the key trends in our industry, which means increasing the automation of our plants while remaining flexible in our operations. Another trend will be the use of big data, which is something that we are looking to also implement here at Pfizer in Puerto Rico. The opportunities that come along with collecting and analyzing information in real-time are nearly endless and will give us a better process understanding and process control, which will allow us to continue to provide the best quality to our patients. As we are a global site, we are one of the leaders within our network, when it comes to implementing new technologies in our manufacturing process.

Taking these disruptions into account, how do you see this change the role of plant managers working in operations management?

Technology will change not only my role but the tasks of all employees involved in the manufacturing process. The industry and the responsibilities of workers were completely different forty years ago and both will continue to evolve, as we bring new technologies into our process. We need to evolve and adapt our operations, but the human element will always have a key role.

With 11 of the Top 20 pharma companies manufacturing on the island, there must be strong competition for talent on the island. What makes Pfizer the company of choice?

Pfizer offers an international, dynamic and fun working culture, which is highly attractive for young professionals. I am the best example of Pfizer can enable an international career and Puerto Rican engineers and technicians are also supporting sites in the US mainland, Mexico, Brazil and even Asia. Puerto Rico boasts one of the most talented workforces in pharmaceutical manufacturing in the world, due to a strong university system and the long-standing history of our industry on the island. Pfizer also has graduate programs in cooperation with local universities, that brings students to our sites and shows them different aspects of the manufacturing process through a rotational program, not only here in Vega Baja but also at our other sites.

What is your vision for Pfizer Puerto Rico when we return to the island for our next report in 2024?

Puerto Rico will continue to play a key role within our network, and we will strengthen our value proposition of having high quality and reliable supply at an affordable cost. My colleagues are engaged and dedicated to work on this at each and every level, with responsibilities being moved to the lowest level possible and by continuously simplifying our systems. This has delivered outstanding results and will continue to do so, particularly in terms of productivity and reliability. We want to continue to be one of Pfizer’s most reliable plants for the supply of products.

You have spent most of your career at Pfizer and will celebrate your 20th anniversary this year. What makes working at Pfizer so special for you personally?

Pfizer is not a boring company and allows personal and process development and gives you many opportunities. I have seen the site in Ascoli transforming and in my three years here in Puerto Rico, our sites have taken on many new challenges. Additionally, Pfizer puts the patient at the centre of everything we do, and for me personally, this is what brings a purpose to my daily work.

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