

Sara Montero - Managing Director, Lundbeck Mexico, Central America & Andean Countries



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Sara Montero, managing director of Lundbeck Mexico, Central America and Andean countries since January 2020, explains her key priorities and the importance of the region for Lundbeck, highlights the current situation for mental illness in Latin America (LatAm) and outlines her objective to bring innovative treatments to Mexican patients.

How are you dealing with the current global coronavirus pandemic? What instructions have you received from Lundbeck headquarters in Denmark?

The entire world is facing a terrible situation. As a global company, we have guidelines from headquarters that we must follow, but we also have to adapt locally. For example, here in Mexico we are entering phase two of the outbreak, so we are following guidelines from the authorities here. Since I oversee a region which includes more than 17 countries, we need to adapt to the decisions of each local authority.

We have to take into account the fact that since mid-March COVID-19 has been advancing very quickly in LatAm. We have already begun to put in place remote working for all our employees and starting from the week beginning 16th March we have been implementing this measure in LatAm region and beginning 23rd of March in Mexico. This will last at least until May.

We have assembled a COVID-19 committee to analyze the situation that includes all of our teams: from medical professionals to communications, human resources, distribution, and commercial. We are conducting daily meetings to evaluate the situation in each country. We are trying to show our commitment to our employees and explain the importance of taking care of themselves. More than ever it is important to adapt and work remotely. We are evaluating the purchase of masks and gels for our employees when the governments begin /advise to leave the houses.

What were your first priorities on taking over the role, and what were your main impressions on the wide region you cover?

From a personal point of view, it was a significant challenge to move here from Spain with my family. Luckily for us we share the same language, but it was still a big step. From a professional point of view, it was a great opportunity for me. This is my first position as managing director of a wide region, with very different local environments, so I have had to adapt quickly.

Mexico and LatAm is one of Lundbeck's key regions, not only because of the size of the population, but because of the great potential to contribute to better mental health across the region.

Lundbeck has a lot of work to do, together with the authorities and the various stakeholders, in order to improve the quality of life of patients who suffer from psychiatric and neurological diseases.

In my two and a half months as head of Lundbeck here, I have been able to increase collaboration with medical committees, society at large, and people suffering with mental illness.

At Lundbeck our goal is to help patients to have a better quality of life. One of our main priorities is reinforcing the company's positioning, bringing innovative treatments in mental health to patients. Lundbeck is a unique company globally in that it exclusively focuses on diseases of the central nervous system (CNS). We invest 25 percent of our profits into R&D to develop high quality treatments in CNS. We are convinced that if we combine innovative products and effective treatments, and also awareness, the result will be an improved quality of life for patients.

What is the strategic significance of the region you are managing for Lundbeck and what is the importance of Mexico as a regional hub?

We are confident that despite all the changes that the region must face, we will still perform well in the coming years. Having a strong presence in the region is a real opportunity.

The Mexican affiliate was set up 20 years ago, and we have managed to build up excellent stakeholder relationships here. Mexico is one of the biggest countries worldwide in terms of population and has always been a strategic country geographically. Our main objective here is to continue to create awareness around mental health. It is important that the medical community and the patients understand the various CNS diseases. Nowadays, the Mexican government are launching a new policy, and a new plan, and it is important to work closely with them for the population.

Neurodegenerative and mental diseases carry a social stigma all around the world.

What is the perception of mental diseases in Mexico and how would you evaluate the level of care for CNS patients in the country?

The entire global environment is challenging – even more so with the current situation – but mental health is not at the top of agenda. However, it is important to work with the various stakeholders to improve the treatment and acceptance of these diseases. The level of understanding of CNS is not high, not only in this region but in the whole world, so we must work hard in order to foster a better understanding and identification of mental illness.

Ten years ago, it was difficult for people living with schizophrenia and psychological disorders to have a normal life. Now, thanks to the development of available treatments they are able to live with their families, get married and so on and so forth.

The Mexican population is getting older, so CNS illnesses are increasing here. With our unique positioning, it is our objective to raise awareness at both the local and global level. Thanks to improvements in the level of treatments available, we will be able to match the unmet needs of patients even more. Our mission is to see less discrimination and stigma towards mental health issues such as depression and bipolar disorder.

How is Lundbeck working with both industry and non-industry stakeholders to increase awareness and improve treatment for psychiatric and neurological conditions?

Lundbeck's goal is to always be a strategic partner and work together with all actors, from the authorities to the patient associations, the medical community, and the patients and caregivers. We conduct many activities both globally and locally to raise awareness and improve education. We maintain a consistent relationship and communication with all of these stakeholders. We have put in place various initiatives, especially regarding learning programs and we are regularly training our physicians and the medical community about the latest trends and discoveries in diagnosis, treatment and disease.

At the global level we have various initiatives such as our patient summit, where we invite the presidents of patient associations. The idea is to share our knowledge together and connect associations worldwide to help them create better strategies to tackle mental disease (best practice sharing). And finally, we are working with families and caregivers to reply to their questions and improve their life with illness.

Looking at Lundbeck's global portfolio in CNS and neurology, how adapted is it to the needs of the population here? What are the key areas of growth you see in the region and in Mexico?

In Mexico, we have a huge portfolio. We are currently commercializing more than 10 products and are fully dedicated to bringing innovative products for the treatment of mental disease to patients. At the global level we are focusing on Alzheimer's, depression, Parkinson's, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and migraines.

At Lundbeck, R&D is at the center of our business. We have more than 1,200 employees dedicated to this area in Denmark and in China. In Mexico we are focusing primarily on depression, schizophrenia, Alzheimer, migraine and sleep disorders. In fact, in 2022, we will launch two new drugs. One will be the first biological treatment for migraine and the other will be for schizophrenia and bipolar disease. We are excited to bring innovative products to Mexico and provide effective treatments in the mental health field.

Brintellix/Trintellix is the major revenue driver for the company globally. What is the situation with this product in Mexico?

It is our main product here, indicated for depression. The product has a unique multimodal mechanism and is one of the most innovative drugs in the treatment of depression. A lot of people

have depression and before taking the product were not able to lead a normal life. Patients had trouble in terms of concentration for example. The treatment has demonstrated efficacy not only on somatic but also on cognitive symptoms that permits people to recover their previous life.

What are your strategic goals and priorities for the foreseeable future in Mexico and across the region?

We have great potential to grow in the region. Our main goal is to continue to work to promote mental health and bring innovative treatments to patients to improve the quality of life of patients with psychiatric and neurologist diseases.

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