

Interview: Abrie Hanekom â?? Country Manager, BMS South Africa



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The country manager for BMS South Africa talks about the company's first to market strategy, and how BMS has shifted the treatment paradigm for oncology in South Africa.

Through our platform, we introduce the leaders of the pharma industry, and their partners to our 95,000 readers around the world. With that in mind, would you please introduce yourself and the South African affiliate to our readers?

I will have been with BMS four years from the 1st of September 2011. Previously I was employed by Merck Sharp and Dohme, where I focused specifically on biologics and oncology. I always aspired to work at BMS due to its transformation into a diversified specialty biopharma company. I was employed as the business unit manager, in charge of the oncology, hematology and immunology businesses, re-launching some of our products to market. BMS was transforming into a diversified specialty biopharma company and my role was in turn expanded into many different aspects of the company. As of 1st August, I have been appointed as a Country Manager and I am excited to have this opportunity.

What is your particular vision for the company?

We have started incorporating the diversified specialty biopharma model in the South African subsidiary. Of foremost importance is to continue the good work that we are currently doing. We focus on driving our People Strategy of "Engage, Empower & Enrich" within BMS and we have taken on several initiatives to institutionalize our People Strategy. The third component is to focus on immuno-oncology in our markets in South Africa. In January 2015 we were the first company to launch an immune-oncology product in the South African market,

At BMS the patient is at the centre of all we do and that satisfaction, of being in a company that makes a large difference to people's lives, is a big part of what motivates me.

Around the world, BMS medicines help millions of people in their fight against such diseases such as cancer, cardiovascular disease and HIV/AIDS. Where are the growth spots for the company in South Africa?

BMS South Africa focuses on a number of major components: general oncology, non-solid tumors, and immunology including rheumatoid arthritis. The focus is on metastatic melanoma in immuno-oncology. We will soon hope to be in other indications like lung and renal cell cancer.

Our goal is to bring new innovative medicines to South African patients as quickly as possible. Molecules that will be utilized in Oncology, Immunology and Immuno-Oncology.

In light of the on-going implementation of the NHI initiative, how will the country balance increasing access to accessible healthcare while ensuring there remains a place for innovation?

We believe that comprehensively addressing access-to-medicine challenges requires collaboration and is a shared responsibility between governments, NGOs/aid organizations, payers and the industry. Appropriately pricing innovative medications involves assessing their potential impact on health outcomes, affording for patients' and countries' economic circumstances, and accounting for the financial and human resources required to develop these medicines.

Partnering has long been an important element of the company's business strategy, with a well-established record of successfully building partner discoveries into significant therapies. What importance does the affiliate attach to partnering and building strategic and enduring relationships with relevant stakeholders?

Bristol-Myers Squibb has long since recognized that innovation happens everywhere and, as such, partnering has been an important element of our business strategy for decades. We actively seek access to scientific innovations that complement our internal R&D efforts. Our Business Development team works closely with R&D and commercial leadership to identify opportunities within our strategy that address areas of high unmet medical need across the spectrum of drug development, from discovery to late stage clinical trials and commercialization. Bristol-Myers Squibb has a well-established record of successfully building partner discoveries into significant therapies which help patients prevail against serious diseases.

What is it that differentiates BMS South Africa from its competitors?

We have a first to market model, and I believe that at the moment this is our differentiating factor. We aim to meet the needs of our patients. We focus on sound clinical evidence in presenting these highly specialized medicines to the medical community.

As the country manager for BMS South Africa, what are the three most fundamental things you would like to achieve within the next few years?

My ambition is to build on the success of BMS in the South African market. We want to encourage and develop our people to be successful in all their goals. Key to this is to create an inclusive environment where employees feel a part of the company and to equip them with the tools to be part of a successful organization.

On a personal level what motivates you every day?

I have recently become a father and when I look at my son and my wife I know that at BMS we work for patients who have young and old families and know the importance of their loved ones. I do feel that I make a difference in people's lives, big or small. It is very rewarding to see the success we have in extending the lives of our patients in the medicines we bring to this market.

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