

Interview: Alberto Wicker CEO, Signufarma, Mexico



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Alberto Wicker, CEO at Signufarma, explains how patient compliance programs can enhance the national healthcare system through reducing the cost of treatment as well as improving patients' quality of life and showcases the added value of Signufarma's business solutions to enhance the medical compliance of Mexican patients.

Could you please introduce to our international audience the main activities and operations of Signufarma?

I founded Signufarma more than 27 years ago and the activity of the company has been evolving according to the latest industry trends and clients' demands. Indeed, we started offering mainly medical education programs but we are currently more focused on patient support programs and compliance for the Mexican patients to properly follow their treatment.

It is very interesting to mention that for most chronic diseases patients will not take their medications for more than three months and, usually, those are lifetime treatments. Indeed, most of those patients stop complying with their medical prescriptions because, even though they are still suffering such disease, they think that they are already cured. Therefore, Signufarma has been developing and implementing some strategies such as basic medical education initiatives and follow-up activities to enhance the medical compliance of patients in Mexico.

During the last decade, we have been quite focused on targeting those therapeutic areas that have a high impact to the entire health system such as diabetes, as well as identifying all the factors that may affect the adherence of such patients to their treatments. Thanks to that, we have been able to

implement some action plans to fully address the patients' needs. We are always putting the patient in the center of our strategy to properly define a tailor-made and personalized treatment to each patient; the so-called 'patient-centricity'.

What have been the main accomplishments of the company in the last five years?

The most important one has been to showcase the added value of our business model based on the results of our patients. We have reached 97 percent of treatment compliance of our patients in some therapeutic areas such as osteoporosis. Such impressive figures have been achieved through anticipating the patients' behavior and giving basic medical education.

Another accomplishment that I would like to highlight is that we have recently launched three international programs with leading pharmaceutical companies in Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, and Peru.

Last but not least, we have conducted around five audits of our distribution business line from our clients located in the UK, Switzerland, Japan and the US in 2016 and all quality tests demonstrated outstanding results. Such audits have given us a certification of quality that reinforces our commercialization capabilities.

Signufarma has a quite diversified offering of products sorted into three main business lines: therapeutic compliance, direct distribution and contact center. Could you explain to our international readers the added value of each of them?

Therapeutic compliance is our main business line and we are positioned as one of the leading companies in this area in Mexico. As aforementioned, we ensure the patients receive the proper adapted treatment. In fact, the other two business divisions help us offer a better service in such line.

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Referring to our direct distribution division, even though we did not have the intention to become a distributor of drugs, we identified the existing necessity of bringing the medicines to the patient at the right time. The new definition of quality goes hand in hand with convenience and this is exactly the added value of such business line that is bringing the medicine directly to the door of the patient. Our last business line - our contact center division - is a specialized tool composed by medical professionals to serve the rest of the business areas

What is the contribution of each of your business lines and where do you foresee most growth?

We enjoy quite a healthy mix since services and distribution are 50 percent of our gross profit, although in the past, 80 percent of our gross profit came from our services division. We have been fostering our diversification strategy to have a balanced business. It is worth mentioning that although 85 percent of our revenues come from our distribution business line, the variable costs in such division are drastically higher than our services business.

We have perceived an epidemiologic (chronic and non-communicable) and demographic (ageing population) transition in Mexico; how has it impacted your operations considering that you are one of the leading companies in supporting the adherence of patients to the treatment of chronic diseases?

It has obviously positively impacted our operations and, based on the outstanding results that our services have delivered, we are treating more chronic disease patients. In addition, we are also

giving emotional support to such patients and their family since Signufarma's business is not just about giving them the treatment but also goes with all the personal support that they may need alongside their treatment.

Mikel Arriola told us that his main objective is to ensure the financial sustainability of the IMSS while focusing on chronic diseases. In addition, it is a fact that the government does not have enough resources to treat the national patients' needs and such a social cost could be minimized through fostering healthier lifestyle and prevention practices. As Signufarma is also offering solutions in this area, what are your conclusions on that and how have you felt supported by other stakeholders?

As you mentioned, it is a reality that the government does not have the resources to treat all Mexican patients; therefore, efficiency should be the path of development. It is surprising when one realize that the treatment of a patient will cost around 10 times more if such patient does not follow the treatment correctly. Signufarma stands as a solution to the public and private institutions to minimize the cost of treatment.

In this sense, we are currently partnering with the government and the private sector to develop a diseases management program for Hepatitis C, which will ensure that the patients that are suffering such diseases are properly following their treatment. The next step of this initiative is to showcase to the public health institutions that our model helps the patients to enhance their quality of life as well as reduces the cost of treatment.

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We have perceived that technology is breaking health boundaries through digitalization in the healthcare industry, for instance through offering remote tracking. What are your conclusions on that and how is this translated into your product portfolio?

All our operations are backed up by IT platforms with high-value data that enable us to predict patients' behavior in terms of treatment compliance. Additionally, we have defined and implemented several KPIs in such database that inform us when a patient is not properly complying with the treatment as well as an action plan to react when such alarm appears in order to realign the patient with the doctor's prescription.

What are the key objectives that you would like to achieve in the coming three years?

One of my main priorities as CEO of the company is to position Signufarma as the national and regional reference of patients' compliance programs through showcasing our results and best practices to treat patients.

Furthermore, we want to create a specific department fully devoted to understand the patients' needs by carrying out individual observation activities. This will help us to better understand our patients as well as to identify the reasons why they could stop complying with their treatment.

Finally, I aim to professionalize and institutionalize the way Signufarma is delivering medicines to its patients. Everything is currently fully centralized in Mexico City and I would like to implement a more decentralized distribution system that will minimize the response time to our clients' requests.

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