

Interview: Ana Torres, Country Manager, Pfizer Portugal



20.02.2014

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What is Pfizer Portugal’s standing today in the local market?

Pfizer is committed to better health in Portugal and to ensuring access to our medicines in times of financial hardship. Recognizing the challenges that the Portuguese health system is facing, we have been major contributors to the savings efforts. We now need the government and our stakeholders to understand that access is critical to respond to our patients’ needs.

What specific measures have you taken to adapt to the changing environment?

In Portugal, in the period 2011-2013, the pharmaceutical industry alone contributed 38 percent for the financial adjustment within the health sector. In austerity times, we have continued supply and accepted short-term financial constraints.

With high delays in access and reimbursement of our products, Pfizer has been facing particular challenging times. In response, we optimized our capital allocation, boosted existing synergies, and most importantly, we were able to count on our people to do “more with less”.

What is the relevance of R&D for Pfizer Portugal?

Although Pfizer is today one of the major contributors to Investigator-Initiated Research in Portugal in very important areas like inflammation, vaccines and rare diseases, it is also important that we reverse the trends observed concerning our levels of local investment in R&D, namely through the attraction of more clinical trials to our country.

Can Portugal become a hub for oncology research?

Portugal does have internationally well-recognized research centers for oncology. I think that Portugal has all the conditions to exceed in research in the future, particularly in oncology.

Portugal is not the most attractive country in the world to do clinical trials. What will it take to incentivize pharmaceutical companies to engage in trials here?

In the past, it is true that there were huge delays for the approval of clinical trials in Portugal. Research institutes and universities realized this, as well as their lack of technological efficiency. As a consequence, they have worked meticulously to change their approach and prepare themselves to take on more work in terms of clinical trials. Many of these institutes worked in partnership with Pfizer Portugal for this preparation, and timings are now in line with what we see in Europe and beyond. This has been an area of significant improvement, and Pfizer Portugal is pursuing consistent efforts to increase the number of clinical trials in our country.

Could Portugal become the California of Europe?

I firmly believe that in Portugal we have outstanding investigators and Research Units of excellence!

Hospital administrators are playing a greater role in decision-making, as opposed to decisions being solely taken by physicians. As such, how have you adapted your strategy?

Portugal's archetype is changing rapidly. Hospital administrations indeed have more intervention today in the decision-making process. We are moving from a 100 percent physician-based decision to a balance between hospital administrations and physicians, since Portugal's national health system is mainly public. Some hospitals take most decisions based on pharmacoeconomic studies, while others base their decisions more on clinical data. While I do not think that hospital administrators will ever be the sole decision makers, we are definitely moving from a purely physician-based decision to a more shared one.

Has the evolution of multi-channel marketing (MCM) affected your strategy?

It has been affected in a very positive way. We are directly responding to our customers needs by innovating in the way we bring information they need, in the format they choose, at the time of their convenience. Based on available data, the Internet is one of the ways physicians prefer to conduct scientific and data updates. In Portugal, where a face-to-face approach is still preferred, MCM has been providing a very useful complement to our sales representatives and account managers work, reinforcing the share of voice and contributing to the value we bring to our customers.

Pfizer might divest its off-patent segment in the future. How would that affect you, and what is the right strategy for this affiliate?

At this time, Pfizer has not made and is not in a position to make any decision regarding any potential future action. Our focus is now on getting the established business to perform optimally and finalizing the strategic direction to produce growth.

How do you see competition in Portugal?

Pfizer is competing for the value it brings to patients and society. Therefore, we are focused in delivering every day to physicians and other stakeholders the evidence to show the value of our medicines.

Pfizer is currently ranked third in Portugal behind Novartis and MSD. What are your targets, and how do you intend to get to the number one position?

To achieve this, it is imperative to fix our innovative core, to make the right capital allocation decisions that maximize value, to earn greater respect from society and continue to nurture an ownership culture within our company. We want to be best in class in our focused therapeutic areas and to be the first choice for physicians when treating their patients.

What is your vision for the pharmaceutical industry's future in Portugal, and how will Pfizer fit?

The pharmaceutical industry will continue to play a critical role in the healthcare system in Portugal. It will be inevitable that we work together more often with government, payers, health professionals, academia and patients to find responses to current and future challenges, ensuring we meet the right balance between pharmaceutical industry and society's expectations. Government has turned to pharmaceuticals multiple times over the past few years for savings. Significant gains in efficiency are still to be explored in other healthcare areas.

What would you like to communicate to the Portuguese healthcare community at large?

Stop looking at short-term savings and start looking at the future—take a holistic approach to health system efficiency by assessing the value of our medicines wider societal benefits. Use all of Portugal's strengths, such as our outstanding healthcare providers, unparalleled R&D options, and maximize the quality of our country's healthcare in the future. Pfizer will continue to do the best for patients and work towards a healthier and better world.

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