

Interview: Beaver Tamesis â?? President & Managing Director, MSD Philippines

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Beaver Tamesis, Managing Director at MSD Philippines, discusses the companyâ??s impressive growth in recent years as well as their expanding portfolio. Additionally, he discusses his work to foster engagement and motivation throughout the MSD affiliate in the country.

When we first met you in 2013 you were only a few months into the leadership role here at MSD Philippines. What were a few of the main goals and objectives that you had when you stepped in to this position?

2013 was a major transition period for MSD, we had to reevaluate and find our footing and work to stay relevant in the local market. We managed to accomplish this very quickly, and we were able to define the key objectives necessary to move forward and thrive in the country. We focused on the main therapeutic areas that have become critical to the Filipino market; diabetes, cancer and cardiovascular disease. At the same time, we saw the need for a new entrant in oncology, and we were able to move heaven and earth and launch our oncology therapy 2 years earlier than was originally planned. The original plan was to launch this product in 2018, however, we recognized the need to make it available much sooner, and it was launched in March of this year. Even in the short time since it was launched in the country it has started to impact many lives, with more than 90 patients receiving the treatment.

Could you describe some of the ways that MSD collaborates with the government to expand access to healthcare here in the Philippines?

Expanding access to the poorer segments of the population is something that we are passionate about, and to accomplish this we much partner with the government. We have been very successful at participating in government tenders to supply vaccines, particularly for HPV and pneumonia, which have been the main areas of focus in the market. More important than just being a supplier, we needed to work closely with government to make sure that the vaccines get into the body of the relevant population. We need to make sure that the children are vaccinated with a two dose regime

for HPV, because children, age 9-10, have a fantastic immune response to vaccine, and it is highly economical in addition to providing long-term protection. We have been working with the government to accomplish this, making sure that we get vaccination rates where they should be. Currently we are hitting around 78% of the target population, the global average is around 30%, so this rate is really fantastic. This is a tribute to the responsiveness of the Department of Health and their willingness to work with us to make sure that the whole sector is aware of and in line with this project's goals. This has been an area that we have really focused our efforts, not just as a supplier, not just as a vendor, but rather as a partner working towards achieving mutual success. This is something we are passionate about, because we view this work as nation building, contributing to the development and progress of our nation.

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Additionally, we are also focused on maternal mortality, as we have one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world. To address this, we have been supplying implants, and are planning on collaborating again with the government in the near future to drive demand and awareness. We often visit our teams in the field, and recently one doctor was mentioning that 20 percent of live births in his area were a result of teenage pregnancy. We are motivated to address this, by making sure that everything you need to lift up the community is available. To do this we also partner with groups such as the Zuellig Family Foundation, helping them to upscale their work. In a sense, this is a part of our corporate social responsibility, but at the same time we feel that we must do in terms of contributing to society as a whole.

When you stepped into the leadership role in 2013 it was a challenging time for MSD, and you mentioned the need to refocus and define the company's relevance in the market. As the first Filipino head of MSD, what unique perspective do you think that has given you in terms of leading MSD?

I am a doctor by trade, so I have always had a focused on the customer and patient. I have always been focused on what the customers' needs are, versus simply their desires. Hopefully this perspective has helped to guide us at MSD. Often times the customer thinks very differently from what the representative on the ground thinks, so you must be able to understand both roles, and bring in both perspectives into the discussions. In general, this is about getting into the heart and minds of the people that we hope will use our products and bringing these people into the discussion, something that I believe I have accomplished.

You have had extensive experience working outside of the Philippines, for example your work spearheading MSD's diabetes medication in 7 different countries throughout the region. How have you been able to leverage that international experience to benefit your work here at MSD Philippines?

My colleagues have commented that they have not seen anybody work in the way that I do. The regional employees tended to be viewed as simply giving advice and orders. However, I felt that my role was to make sure that we had the capabilities on the ground, and I had to be actively involved to make sure that our team was as competent as possible. This is something I learned during my regional work experience. It is important for me to roll up my sleeves and be active in the process on the ground, so that when we sat to discuss future plans I am well versed in all aspects of the strategy. I have been active in identifying the thought leaders and figuring out who we need to meet and partner with. There is a lot of work to do in terms of educating the medical community about our products, and through this process I was able to develop a network of colleagues and friends throughout the country. This demonstrated how we worked and inspired people to follow us forward, effectively translating thought into action.

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One of the things that I have strived to do is instill this type of attitude within my leadership team, which is why many times we go out into the field together. Prior to my tenure, it was a rare event that the leadership teams would go out into the field, and now it is quite common. Through this process we get out and speak to the patients and the doctors, we learn about what are viewed as positive aspects of MSD as well as things that we can improve on. These trips out into the field have caused a total change in attitude among the leadership teams here at MSD.

How has the implementation of PhilHealth impacted the operations of MSD in the Philippines?

As an innovative company, we need to be realistic with our expectations in terms of PhilHealth. For the most part, generics have a very important role in the Philippines, representing around 60-70 percent of the market. Multinational companies (MNCs) are more active in the innovative and branded space, and of course the pricing is very different in this regard when compared to generics. In terms of immediate impacts on the country's healthcare industry, what we are seeing now is that huge amounts of the money are being poured into infrastructure. When you go to provincial hospitals now they suddenly look like first class hospitals. PhilHealth has transformed the public sector industry by creating respectable hospitals, in terms of both skill and infrastructure. Additionally, we are seeing now that hospitals are able to identify patients very quickly to determine whether they should have the no balance billings. Right now, I believe that the initial impacts of PhilHealth have been amazing.

From the perspective of the MNCs, we are currently actively discussing many aspects of this legislation with the Department of Health. Right now, PhilHealth is, by law and practice, only allowed to reimburse medicinal products included in the national formulary. To get into the national formulary you need to demonstrate both efficacy and medical need, and because of this process you are caught between a rock and a hard place. You do not have local data to provide an analysis about your product, so you must look to similar markets with similar costs to try and make comparisons, something that we have been struggling with. To address this, we have been lobbying with the Department of Health to separate reimbursement from being included within the national formulary. Entering into the national formulary, in my mind, should be solely focused on whether or not there is a medical need, and whether or not the drug actually works, especially when compared to the standard of care. This should be a completely different discussion than being reimbursed for PhilHealth. We believe that we have managed to plant the idea of separating these two entities, and in this regard we have seen improvement. More people in the government are willing to have a constructive dialogue with us, we are having great conversations and are building trust.

Looking at the portfolio of MSD in the Philippines, including vaccines and pharmaceuticals, which area is currently driving the most growth?

The portfolio of MSD has dramatically evolved in the past years. In 2010, which is when many of the changes in the industry occurred, we were essentially a one product company. By 2012, JANUVIA, and its product family treating diabetes, became our biggest brand, and right now is worth more than 21 million dollars in the country. In 2013 we began to compete in the government sector as well, adding another pillar to our business. Lastly, our oncology line also represents a growing importance within our company's portfolio. As you can see we have managed to greatly diversify our product portfolio, and all of these fields are driving growth for MSD.

I am proud that we have developed a strong and positive company culture, something that has filtered down to every level of the organization

If you look back over your tenure as Managing Director, what do you believe is your proudest accomplishment?

I am proudest of leading the company into the very positive situation that we are in now. I worked to transform the organization into the stable and growing place where we are now, a place where the entire group is highly motivated, not just the leadership team. People are passionate about what they do. I am proud that we have developed a strong and positive company culture, something that has filtered down to every level of the organization. People truly understand our strategic direction and what our vision is for the company.

Looking forward to the next 3-5 years, what do you hope to have accomplished here at MSD?

By 2020 I hope that we have grown into a 200-million-dollar organization. Additionally, I hope that I will still be the General Manager here at MSD, something I believe will be possible as we are on the right trajectory as a company. As a team, we will continue to make sure that we are relevant, that we are bringing products to the market as quickly as possible, and that we take full advantage of all of the opportunities that are present here in the Philippines. Lastly, I look forward to continuing and expanding our mutually beneficial collaborations with the government.

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