

# Interview: Cheryl Maley – President & Managing Director, Novartis Philippines

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*Cheryl Maley, General Manager of Novartis Philippines, discusses the company’s operations in the country, their growing portfolio of products as well as their impressive focus on research and development in the Philippines. She also discusses some of her key objectives and goals for her first country leadership role.*

**As an introduction to our readers both in the Philippines and around the world, could you provide a brief overview of your professional background prior to stepping into your first country leadership role here in the Philippines?**

I have been working in the pharmaceutical industry for nearly 20 years, ranging from my first sales representative role working for Servier and then for Wyeth. I then took 5 years off from the industry, working for a consultancy firm where we worked across many different industries, focused on strategic planning and operational excellence. I then came back and worked for Abbott and AbbVie for 8 years, and have now been with Novartis for 3 years.

**When you stepped into this role, what were some of the key objectives that you had?**

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As I understood this opportunity, my objectives were centered around leveraging the experience that I have had, particularly regarding commercial focus and enhancing patient access to medicines. In addition to this I really want to focus on developing the talent that Novartis has locally and provide career opportunities locally, regionally and globally. Focusing on the people and the culture, is a key

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priority for me in any leadership role. .

**Considering your extensive regional experience, what were your first impressions of the healthcare system here in the Philippines?**

I had some exposure to the countries throughout Asia when I worked in my global role for AbbVie, but most of my experience comes from my time in Australia, where we have absolute universal healthcare, so it was a transition coming to a predominately self-paying market. The contrast is significant, so I was focused on finding out what I could bring in terms of experience. Now that I am here, I feel like I have a much better understanding of the system, partly due to my work with my colleagues in Pharmaceutical and Healthcare Association of the Philippines (PHAP). I have also learned a lot from discussions with government officials, learning what their priorities are as well those of the key opinion leaders in various specialty areas.

**Was there anything that surprised you about the sector in the Philippines?**

Firstly, there is the significant opportunity, not just from a Novartis perspective but more broadly for all Filipinos. There is a clear government agenda around healthcare, they have prioritized funding, and that has increased significantly over the past few years. When you look back at some of the figures, the growth in funding since 2008 is really quite staggering, as it went from 19 billion PHP to 122 billion PHP this year. This was something that was truly a surprise for me, and I have been very impressed. The other surprising thing is just how many in the population are missing out on healthcare. That is a drive for all of us, assuring that those who need it most get access to healthcare.

**How have you found the state of industry collaboration?**

This is another area where I have been pleasantly surprised, as PHAP and industry collaboration is actually very strong here in the Philippines. The agenda is clear, and it is not simply self-fulfilling, it is very much motivated to create better outcomes for the healthcare system throughout the country. I also have found the collaboration between the private and public sector to be very impressive. Internally within Novartis, this is actually an area where the Philippines stands out as well, as a model for collaboration between the private and public sectors.

**As Novartis has an impressive portfolio or innovative products globally, are there any you are most excited about bringing to the Philippines?**

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The impressive portfolio of products is actually one of the key reasons that led me to join Novartis a few years ago. Their impressive portfolio and pipeline, as well as their focus on innovation is something that is very dear to me. There is such a strong pipeline at Novartis, in various therapeutic areas, and the goal is to really focus on the areas of the highest need. With that in mind, the Philippine becomes an obvious choice for many of the drugs that are to become available soon. They range across so many therapeutic areas as well, and over the next few years, we are going to see many introductions of products into the Philippines.

**Which therapeutic areas do you view as being most important in the country?**

This year, we are focusing on medicines we have recently launched, for example in the area of heart failure, where we have recently launched a breakthrough medicine. We know that chronic disease, for example diabetes and heart disease, are extremely high in the Philippines compared to other countries, so this is one area I am very excited about. Additionally, I look forward to bringing more

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products into the therapeutic areas of psoriasis and rheumatology, where patients often have a poor quality of life with these very debilitating diseases. Quality of life can be so poor for these people from such a young age, so these are really the areas where I want to focus, as we do have the opportunity to change these people's lives.

**We have heard from many different stakeholders about the challenges with regards to increasing access to healthcare in the country. How has Novartis worked to address these challenges?**

From us, as an organization, we are focused on providing more access, both locally and globally, wherever we can. From an industry perspective, this is one of the highest areas of focus. I will give you some examples of what Novartis has done here in the Philippines.

Novartis has provided, just in the Philippines, over 175,000 anti-malaria treatments since 2003. From an oncology perspective, we have an access to medicines program that has provided medicines to 2,500 patients, totaling roughly 400 million USD. If we take it a step further, from just Novartis, we are also taking a multi-stakeholder approach, which is the Palawan Access to Medicines Project. Within that initiative, we are working with the Department of Health, local government as well as with MSD, Pfizer, Sanofi, and the John Hopkins University and the Bill and Malinda Gates Foundation. This is a comprehensive program, ensuring that the patients of the highest need get access to treatments at a differential price. This is still an ongoing project, and it is a great model showing that we will try different things, we will engage with the right stakeholders to be able to really increase access for patients.

**Clinical trials are an area that Novartis has been very active in here in the Philippines. Could you expand more on the importance of these activities?**

This is really an exciting area for me. Clinical trials are fundamental to the development of innovative medicines, and if you look globally, looking at the top 10 investors in research and development across all industries, Novartis is number 6. I think this shows how important Novartis thinks of R&D globally. Locally, since 2008 we have had 38 clinical trials in the Philippines, and 13 are currently ongoing, across many different diseases. We have been very fortunate with the diversity of the trials that we have been able to engage with locally. We operate in 215 sites, meaning it is not just focused in Manila, but rather spread across the country, including over 2,500 patients.

**On a more personal note, what do you view to be some of the most beneficial management qualities?**

I believe that if you can have a clear vision of what you are trying to achieve together, that you create unity, and engage people around that shared vision. Encouraging people to try different things, to step outside of their comfort zone, to think differently, to be innovative. For me, good management is all about bringing people with you. You should feel more success from a team rather than from yourself.

**As teamwork is something you are passionate about, what have been some of the highlights of working with your team here?**

There is an absolute commitment to people, whether it be patients, clients or the general population, from this team. People are more committed to others than themselves, something that has been very impressive for me. The way in which the people here engage with healthcare professionals, policy makers and all of the various stakeholders is very open. It is genuine, there are no hidden agendas, and I believe that is another one of the great qualities of the team here in the Philippines.

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**Lastly, where do you hope to lead the affiliate in the coming years, what is your vision for the future?**

We have fundamentally played a role in increasing access to medicines in the Philippines, both from an industry perspective and from a Novartis perspective, something I am proud of and look forward to continuing in the future. I also look forward to developing and maintaining the Philippines organization as being the high performing, high talent affiliate of the region, where associates have any opportunity that they wish to have, whether it be here or in other regions as well.

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