

Interview: Filipa Costa – Managing Director, Janssen Portugal



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Filipa Costa returned to Portugal in September 2016 to take on the leadership of the fastest growing multinational affiliate in the country – Janssen. In this interview, she reveals her intention to change the perception of clinical trials in Portugal, current strategies to promote government-industry collaboration and the keys to successfully negotiating an international pharmaceutical career.

What was your mandate when you took on the leadership of the affiliate in September 2016?

When I accepted the role in September 2016, I felt a tremendous responsibility and privilege in continuing Janssen's innovative strategies which bring value to patients. The Portuguese affiliate is one of the fastest growing pharma companies in the country and has been for the past years and therefore when I took over the reins from the former GM, I took over a speedboat. My job was, therefore, to take the helm, consolidate growth and ensure that we accelerate access to innovative treatments to Portuguese patients.

Internally, my challenge revolved around consolidating the excellent team we have here. Being a fast-growing company, we saw more and more young people entering the company which inevitably leads to a healthy turnover, and I wanted to guarantee that we kept a great team in place, by creating the best conditions for career development and growth. Certainly, this consolidation is an ongoing task, but building the team and maintaining a growth rate is a constant goal of mine.

In the past 18 months, we have launched four new drugs on the market; a fantastic feat and a great team effort given the tricky market conditions in Portugal. We have also consolidated business

model and stabilized our people resourcesâ??the most successful caveat to any organization. My vision for the Portuguese affiliate is to deliver beyond the product and be a partner in healthcare as opposed to a mere medicine provider. This vision aligns with Janssen global: as an innovative company, we must make medicines a success and ensure the best outcomes are assured for patients, through a network of collaboration with authorities, healthcare professionals, and startups. That way, we contribute to the sustainability of the entire healthcare ecosystem.

How significant is the Portuguese operation for Janssen globally?

If we consider the portfolio, European medicines are generally made available in Portugal, although sadly there is a considerable delay in market access relative to other European countries. The time taken from EMA approval to access in Portugal, (granted by INFARMED), to hospitals (which have their autonomous procedures), is closer to the two-year mark than the legislated 200 days. The Portuguese affiliate importance goes beyond our (relatively small) market dimension. First, the patients are equally important regardless of the country, and this is the heart of what we do.

Commercially speaking, Portugal is a fast-growing affiliate and a relevant business to European operations. Janssen is the fastest growing company among the top 20 companies in Portugal, and we currently sit as the fourth largest Portuguese pharmaceutical company. We, of course, aim higher! A large part of this success is down to the people and the team we have here, not just the innovative portfolio. I feel great pride in leading this team and knowing that we provide more and more treatments to patients in need.

Additionally, the workforce in life sciences is incredibly well-educatedâ??Portuguese professionals often speak three or more languages which enables international business and communication. Currently, we have almost 30 Portuguese employees either in international assignments or in global regional positions while based in their home country. Portugal is a safe country, and we can be a hub for both Europe and Latin America. Being at the corner of Europe can be a strategic advantage concerning flight schedules, time zones and the mix of nationalities rubbing shoulders in one space. Finally, Portugal is the perfect testbed for the pilot of new ideas, and more and more companies begin to see the value of testing out new and digital ideas because of the mitigated risk associated with our relative size and expertise in complex fields.

Our Headquarters understand the significance of the affiliate given the construction of our new office space. Opened in March this year, our state of the art office hosts 400 J&J Family of Companies employees and shows our commitment to both the Portuguese marketplace and Portuguese patients.

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What is your assessment of market access challenges in Portugal?

INFARMEDâ??s analysis of new medicines is thorough, complete and provides a sound understanding of innovative treatments. The issue is the lack of transparency and agility on offer during the process. Dialogue is difficult, and delays are inevitable in providing and commenting on relevant information; I would suggest that conversations are more accessible than email exchanges, and dialogue catalyzes efficiency. Secondly, the hospitals funding system does not reward innovation or patient outcomes., and it is extremely challenging and causes inefficiencies.

Unfortunately, the risk for bringing in new medicines is almost wholly assumed by the pharmaceutical company, and given that we would never deny our drug to patients in need, it puts us in a compromised position. The new President of INFARMED has made a positive impact in increasing transparency, however changing a public institution does not happen overnight but I trust

we are on the right path!

Janssen makes the case that the healthcare system's financing bodies should move away from considering healthcare in terms of number of patients seen by hospital, or evaluating a hospital's efficiency by measuring bed occupancy rates. Instead, we should observe the entire healthcare potential relief that bringing innovation to patients incurs, and assess patient outcomes on a long-term basis.

How do you initiate these kinds of discussions with the authorities regarding these changes in healthcare?

Firstly, I note that authorities are open to this kind of discussion, and on the whole, we experience good collaboration. Janssen has been driving these debates and contributes to the discussion by highlighting the value of initiating change. We take part at a local level, in forums and local debates, and at a national level. Last year, we hosted Health Parliament Portugal, which derived from a Janssen initiative at a European level. We teamed up with key local partners (Microsoft, University Nova de Lisboa and Expresso, the largest local media group) to launch a program spanning six months including 60 stakeholders external to the healthcare sphere, who contributed to discussions on outcomes-based financing for healthcare systems, mental health policy, or how to put the patient at the center of the debate. There were six themes put up for discussion in total.

The program has been a success, shown by the teams' invitation to be monthly advisors to the Health Minister. Although Janssen sponsored the event, we are independent of the project and merely provided the conditions for good-thinking and the growth of ideas in a collaborative setting. Consequently, these debates should drive forward discussion and lead to positive change for the system.

A byproduct of these exchanges is that we enhance the reputation of the pharmaceutical industry. It is still poorly understood how pharma is incredibly regulated and compliant, and how much we contribute to a healthier society. Particularly with Janssen, which has a sincere reputation for being more than a purveyor of pills, for example in our longstanding commitment to patient associations and pharma-trade associations, we try to maintain an active voice.

Janssen is one of the Top Five pharma companies worldwide investing in R&D. What strengths does the Portuguese healthcare ecosystem offer an innovative life sciences company like Janssen?

The country has the capability, the workforce and the infrastructure to excel in R&D. However, the country is certainly not capturing its full potential. We need to change the regulatory and legal framework to be more competitive with other countries—specifically regarding clinical trials, and the movement is well underway. Portugal is behind other countries regarding the number of clinical trials and investment. Notwithstanding, the authorities have implemented measures to incentivize R&D, such as the creation of a new agency or tax rebates.

One of my top priorities as Janssen MD is to raise awareness of these improvements regarding clinical trials, especially given the tax incentives and the payback system in place, which combined with amelioration in the regulatory framework make clinical trials far more attractive for a Global company than a few years ago. Janssen is a leader in innovation, investing \$8 billion per year across the globe. One of my personal goals is to increase Janssen investment in Portugal, as I said before, the potential is here.

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How do you attract and retain the best talent to Portugal?

Not only do we position Janssen in line with its global reputation—a growing innovator and market leader in many respects—but also, we highlight the excellent working conditions available to prospective candidates. Our consistent, steady growth means there are often opportunities to rotate internally in Portugal, and at large in the global business, career changes to other countries or taking on regional roles are possible. We have been successful in keeping staff motivated in Portugal by creating an environment in which new arrivals rapidly develop their careers creating a platform for growth.

For young people, we address the way in which we work—which aligns sweetly with the Janssen credo: people and above all, patients first, and a real emphasis on community and the responsibility that comes with working in healthcare. Personally, I am delighted with the talent we have attracted, and in Portugal, we see excellent candidates across the board, from trainee roles to more senior positions.

Lastly, the scale and scope of the Portuguese market make the country attractive to try new ideas, especially for first time General Managers. Portugal offers tremendous market access challenges which act as a learning curve for career development. As mentioned, the market is tricky to navigate but that can be a strength for developing one's career and one's resilience. Additionally, I must point out that the Portuguese are welcoming, friendly people, and the language barrier is mitigated given the high level of English spoken across the country.

What advice would you give to an aspiring professional looking to further their career in pharmaceuticals?

The advice I would give to a young professional is to deliver, learn from others, be open to new experiences and ask a lot of questions: curiosity and listening are critical. Focus on doing your best—not only to gain the next promotion—but to take pride in your work. Focusing on learning, working together as part of a team, and not being afraid to speak up are all fantastic tools in driving a career forward. I feel fortunate working at J&J as diversity is one of our embedded values, and has been for a long time. Indeed, employees are valued for behavior and for the work we do in bringing essential innovation to patients.

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