

Interview: Gaby Murphy – Managing Director, EMD Serono, Canada



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At the 350th anniversary of the company, Gaby Murphy, EMD Serono’s managing director, gives an insight into the turning point for the affiliate in 2017 with three new Health Canada approvals.

Over the last few months, we have witnessed significant changes within the Canadian pharmaceutical landscape, especially in terms of pricing. How will this impact your operations?

EMD Serono is part of IMC (Innovative Medicines Canada) and we are collectively driving forward an active dialogue to improve Canada’s regulatory environment and widening the access to innovative medicines. That being said, there will be many changes ahead of us, especially as it relates to the PMPRB (Patented Medicines Prices Review Board) and the proposed changes to the basket of reference countries for innovative drug prices. The big issue we are currently facing as an industry is to predict the impact these changes will have—not only in Canada but also beyond. Historically, Canada has always been a Tier 1 market for product launches, but right now between 60 and 65 percent of all innovative drugs launched are being evaluated by the PMPRB. I sincerely hope that patient access will remain the same to ensure quality of life and life expectancy but it is, of course a risk.

As a result of the proposed changes, I believe that we will also see a ripple effect regarding R&D investment in Canada. If there will be less investment in R&D, we will witness less research being undertaken and of course, less researches active in the field of life sciences. We need to ensure to keep investment flowing into Canada so we can train our amazingly skilled scientists and avoid any

potential brain drain.

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On top of that, people in Canada often do not see the economic impact the pharmaceutical and life sciences world has. Our industry alone provides approximately 30,000 high quality jobs, people that pay taxes and significantly contribute to Canada's economy. Additionally, I am concerned about the fact that the majority of Canadians are not aware of the great difference we make. There is still a stigma around the pharmaceutical industry. There is a great deal of education to be done on that front.

These factors completely change our definitions of short-, mid- and long-term planning. Whereas five years ago "long-term" referred to a period of next ten years, "long-term" today indicates the span of the next two years and even that is optimistic.

How has EMD Serono performed in 2017 what have been some of the highlights of last year?

At EMD Serono, we pursue a double mission: while we focus intently on the present, we are simultaneously preparing for the future. Last year in particular, we were going through a transition in managing people who not only worked on current business but also took care of bringing new products to market.

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While our company has not launched any new products for many years, last year was truly a turning point. We received three NOCs (Notice of compliance) in 2017 and we were able to over-deliver on our objectives. Overall, Canada is typically considered a Tier 1 market for product launches.

Having been personally involved in many launches over the years, such as five different MS drugs in Canada over the years, I keep in mind the advice of a mentor of mine: the key recipe required for a successful product launch is to prepare the brand, prepare the market, and prepare the company. It is important to bear in mind that EMD Serono is a high specialty business, whereas other primary care players are positioned much broader. Oftentimes I like to say that we are doing business in the specialty of the specialty. For example, within the field of neuroscience, we are specialized in MS and in oncology at the moment; we have a niche focus on MCC (metastatic merkel cell carcinoma). These are the areas where we truly make a difference.

How are you positioned in your key therapeutic areas in Canada?

EMD Serono is globally very well known for its leadership position in fertility, Additionally, we have continuously invested into the field of endocrinology and are a solid partner to the Canadian clinics in this area. Our most exciting venture perhaps though is the area of oncology, which we started developing approximately two years ago in collaboration with Pfizer

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How do you tap into Canada's incredible R&D potential?

There are multiple aspects to this question. First of all, one of my biggest responsibilities here is to ensure that people are aware of the great quality of Canadian research centers, as very often, the investment world looks towards the US or Germany first. As I am competing with other countries for

investment, I need to guarantee that I elevate the country's image and its competencies in order for Canada to obtain the visibility and exposure it deserves.

Secondly, within EMD Serono, Canada is clustered with the US in the North America region. This can be seen as an advantage because we are in close proximity to the largest pharmaceutical market in the world.,

Finally, as a company, we need to be open to the research community but we would also like for researchers to be open to us and bring forward investigator driven proposals. We want to be their interface with our global colleagues. This could be at least one other way that we bring forward concepts and designs from the local to the global level.

What are some of the best practices the Canadian affiliate can export to others around the world?

Something Canadians can be really proud of is their amazing talent pool. The number of Canadians in executive positions around the world is impressive. This is also applicable for the EMD Serono world, where many great Canadian talents sit in management positions. I think that the complexity of the pharmaceutical landscape in Canada in all aspects, including access, legislation, pricing, and others, is a good training ground for managers to take on bigger responsibilities once they have completed an assignment here; it allows them to simplify things once they move on to new missions.

On the business side, EMD Serono Canada delivers year after year. We closely follow what we call PIE: performance, image, exposure. In Canada, it is very important to respect those three elements in exactly that order. It is imperative to achieve performance and image before exposing yourself.

Finally, on Merck KGaA's 350th birthday, EMD Serono North America has once more been named amongst the region's top employers. This is our pride and in large part due to our company culture. At every EMD Serono or Merck KGaA affiliate our culture is deeply rooted in the engagement of our employees.

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