

Luca Visini – Managing Director, Eli Lilly, India



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Luca Visini, the recently appointed managing director of Eli Lilly & Company for India, shares with us his first perspective of the Indian ecosystem. He also provides insights into some of his key objectives in India, which include consolidating the reputation of Eli Lilly as a key stakeholder in the local market. In 2018, Eli Lilly India is celebrating its 25 years of presence in India.

You took over the reins of Eli Lilly India few months ago. What have been your first impressions of the Indian ecosystem so far?

As obvious as it may seem, one cannot overlook the fact that the size of the Indian ecosystem is particularly impressive. With a population of over 1.3 billion inhabitants, India represents an unusual and particularly humbling setting to operate in for any foreigner and newcomer to the country.

I can hardly think of another country where I would like to be at this moment. From a personal standpoint, India allows you to experience a pace of development and a cultural diversity at all levels (social, economic, cultural, geographical) and that is absolutely unique in the world. This diversity can take extreme proportions, especially on the economic side: to give you an idea, India has the third highest number of billionaires in the world but 700 million Indians still live with less than USD 2 a day according to World Bank data.

This ever-increasing attention given to India is notably nurtured by the impressive speed at which the country has been progressing over the past years and by the Indian government's continuous efforts to reform, open the economy and develop the country.

From a healthcare perspective, India's large population has complex healthcare needs. Now that I have good knowledge and insights about the Indian ecosystem, I genuinely believe that Eli Lilly's innovative products and robust pipeline of therapies can help address several of India's unmet healthcare needs.

To what extent is this eye-catching speed of development palpable on the healthcare side, in a country where public spending on health amounted to around 1.25 percent of the country's GDP, according to the WHO World Health Statistics 2015?

The public spending on healthcare in India can be considered particularly low in comparison to other large economies and therefore one would expect significant development and additional expenditure within this sector in the future. In this regard, the Indian government is putting a clear emphasis on bolstering the sustained growth in the healthcare sector and sharpening India's global attractiveness as an investment destination. Alongside these two strategic objectives, increasing access to quality healthcare services and products throughout the country obviously emerges as another ultimate goal for the Indian ecosystem as a whole.

While announcing the Union Budget for 2018-19 at the beginning of 2018, the Finance Minister released a new and ambitious National Health Protection Scheme (NHPS). The latter will cover more than 100 million vulnerable families, especially in rural areas, and provide a health insurance cover of INR 500,000 [USD 7,800] for each family per annum. Overall, the NHPS should benefit 500+ million people, thereby standing as one of the largest healthcare initiatives ever implemented worldwide. The NHPS moreover showcases that the Indian government is committed to increasing access and shifting the country's healthcare paradigm through the design and implementation of bold initiatives, although great challenges still lie ahead.

Beyond affordability, we believe that improving healthcare outcomes should also tackle structural and logistics challenges faced by a large share of the Indian population living in rural areas, who may not be able to connect with the country's healthcare network as easily as in urban areas.

You just mentioned the heightened commitment of India's public stakeholders to shifting the healthcare paradigm in the country. Where do pharmaceutical companies enter the picture?

The dedication and commitment of the innovative biopharmaceutical industry in general and Eli Lilly & Company in particular on this front, do echo those of the stakeholders in the public health sector.

Across the industry, innovative companies work to make their innovative, life-changing, and life-saving medications available to the largest pool of patients who are in need for them. Because innovation is only meaningful when it is made available to people at large we do collaboratively work with all stakeholders to provide solutions to address specific access and other challenges that patients may encounter in their journey with their diseases.

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The recently announced NHPS should be implemented by October 2018, and it seems that the government wants to put the emphasis on pure generics products rather than branded generics/branded products. What is the perspective of a leading, innovative multinational company like Eli Lilly on this matter?

As a company, we indisputably and firmly believe that the NHPS stands as a great initiative that should be supported; likewise, Lilly India is fully aligned with the government's objective to increase access to healthcare and medicines in India. At the same time, we are engaged with the authorities on identifying the best ways to fulfill this overarching objective.

We know that biopharmaceutical innovative therapies bring a wave of benefits to society, from improving and extending human life to overall economic growth. To sustain medical progress, the biopharmaceutical industry, that takes financial risks and invests a tremendous amount of time, resources, and capital to bring life-saving treatments to patients, does need ecosystems with policies that support innovation, a pillar in tackling tomorrow's medical challenges.

What is important is that India's regulatory and legal environment fosters the use of less expensive drugs when possible, and at the same time continues to protect innovation.

Only 14 years after patents for pharmaceuticals were introduced in India, it seems that you still identify room for improvements with regards to the IP framework in place in the country?

The fact that the IP framework is a topic of constant discussion with the authorities is a positive sign of the authorities' recognition that innovation can bring value to the overall healthcare system.

For the research based pharmaceutical industry, a robust IP regime, transparent and foreseeable pricing policies and a predictable and streamlined regulatory structure form the three pillars for investment, development and growth. The Government should consider providing the conducive regulatory framework which encourages companies to invest with newer products in India and introduce new, novel and life-saving drugs. It will in turn strengthen innovation and foster cost-effective R&D and manufacturing in India.

The stronger a country's IP framework is, the more innovation-oriented investments can be conducted. The latter enrich the domestic ecosystem and in turn increase the opportunities at hand for the government to reach more patients with drugs answering unmet medical needs.

In a diverse, vast, and strategic market like India, pharmaceutical companies can forge partnerships at the institution, city, state, or national level, but it might be difficult to pursue all these options at once. As a recently appointed managing director, what are your first and foremost priorities?

At Lilly, our mission is to bring innovation and new therapies to make life better to patients who need them in India - we have actively pursued this mission during our 25 years footprint in India and we are determined to continue doing so.

In order to deliver on our mission, we work with various local entities through different types of partnerships. Those partnerships are designed to either optimize our commercial model, make it more efficient, increase the access or availability of our new therapies in the local market or provide enhanced and customized solutions to the healthcare professionals and patients we serve.

For instance, we do have a commercial partnership with Lupin for the promotion and distribution of several Lilly products in our diabetes portfolio. We have initiated this partnership first for the promotion and distribution of one product and then have expanded it in 2016 to include additional therapies. Through this strategic partnership, Lilly is able to expand access to its innovative medicines by leveraging Lupin's coverage network in a large number of territories in India.

Lilly does also collaborate with Gland Pharma for manufacturing human insulin vials in India.

On the communications channels side, Lilly is developing and innovating in its digital capabilities to increase the reach of its products related medical education to healthcare professionals. It has also launched a comprehensive patient support program for people living with diabetes called LIFE 360 - Lilly Injectables for Everyone. LIFE 360 has been built with the underlying philosophy to educate, engage and enhance the experience of people being treated with Lilly injectables.

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Dr. Badwe, the head of the Tata Memorial Center, India's largest oncology center, hopes that multinational companies operating in India will be keener to embrace deeper partnership models, including differentiated pricing, based on the potential to reach a huge number of patients. Where does Eli Lilly stand in this regard?

We believe that competition is the biggest leveler and mandatory price approvals/controls do not necessarily provide tangible benefits to the masses.

The real issue remains access to basic medicines and government is taking the right steps towards providing free access to generic medicines to this segment through welfare schemes.

In general, we advocate adopting a consultative approach for fixing drug prices in which all stakeholders are involved to ensure transparent and market-based pricing caps on essential medicines. The pharmaceutical industry is an integral part of the healthcare system and an all-inclusive outlook is critical for its growth and sustainability to ensure a robust health care environment.

Less than five months into the job, what are some of the key objectives that you want to achieve during your tenure in India?

Our company's mission and our employees' passion and engagement are to strive to make life better to people. We have been committed to this mission for the last twenty-five years through making our medicines available to patients who need them, mainly to people living with diabetes, cancer (lung & stomach), growth hormone disorder, men's health disorders and osteoporosis.

My objective is to challenge our teams to strive each day to take a step forward to address key challenges and overcome barriers that can be encountered along the way of achieving our mission.

We have outlined key priorities for Lilly India moving forward:

The first is achieving excellence in new product launches - we are an innovation driven company which pursues new drug development and works towards medicines reaching people at large

through the different channels.

Secondly, we are keen on collaborating with all local stakeholders in the public and private sectors to understand how we could serve them better, as we plan to bring to market an unprecedented number of new therapies that address unmet needs. Through meaningful partnerships we can contribute to an inclusive, transparent and predictable healthcare system to the benefit of the patients.

Third, and at the base of what we do, our priority is to grow our organization with talented and engaged individuals who reflect the values of our corporations in everything they do, give back to their communities, and act as the best ambassadors to attract new talent and promote Lilly as a top employer in India.

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