

Interview: Theresa Martinez – General Manager, Roche, the Philippines



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Theresa Martinez, General Manager of Roche in the Philippines, defines the pillars of her five-year plan as twofold: lead broader and sustainable access to Roche medical innovations in the Philippines and create a great place to work. She elaborates on her goal of having an impact on the local healthcare system and how this played into her decision to work at Roche.

Having taken over the position of General Manager at Roche in November 2014, what did you outline as your key agenda priorities in the role?

One of the first things I did together with the leaders of the organization was define a five-year vision. The first few weeks following my arrival were spent on listening and learning where the business was and importantly, reflect together with the leaders and managers of the organization where we wanted to take it. The vision that we set for ourselves is based on two principles, the first is to increase access to medicines sustainably and the second is to continue to develop Roche as a great place to work. Looking at the data, I saw enormous room to improve the number of patients who can potentially benefit from Roche medicines in the Philippines. I initiated the Local Access Department for Roche at the beginning of 2015 that is solely focused on enabling broader patient access including overcoming hurdles preventing patients who can potentially benefit from accessing our medicines. Creating a great place to work was a priority because as I saw first-hand in the United States that a highly engaged work force produces the best outcomes.

After spending numerous years in the United States, what inspired you to come back to the Philippines?

Following years of living abroad, I had a deeper interaction with the healthcare system in the Philippines at the beginning of 2014 when my father became very ill. I realized that, from a consumer perspective, things could be better. I was driven to come back to the Philippines in part because I experienced the system myself and I wanted to make a positive impactful change. As a General Manager of the Roche Philippines affiliate, I have the opportunity to drive meaningful change. I also chose to be an active member of PHAP, where today I serve as Vice President. This allows me to interact and influence with key stakeholders in shaping sustainable patient access locally.

What were some of the economic and social changes that you noticed when you came back to the Philippines after numerous years abroad?

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The Philippines has seen tremendous growth in the last 2 decades. The current administration is looking to continue to drive sustainable economic growth by addressing the fundamentals of the economy, attracting manufacturing and businesses to the country. I observe the middle class and spending power has grown creating opportunities to strengthen the voice of the Filipinos. The pharmaceutical industry's growth is propelled by generics, which is helping to increase access to medicine. There remain opportunities to broaden access via structural investments for the population to reach healthcare professionals, and then there remains the issue of broader access to innovative drugs.

Patients deserve access to medical innovation, and in order to enable access there needs to be the right policies in place. We at Roche believe that our work does not stop at innovating medicines and diagnostics, but tremendous effort has to be given to enabling access to these innovations. This being said, we need to collaborate with key stakeholders including the government to make it possible. There is still so much room in terms of expanding potential benefits to patients. In the Philippines, improving access is not just about price, but also about educating physicians and patients about which medicines give patients better outcomes, and we are doing our share in this collaborative effort.

What are some of the benefits of being a Filipino General Manager of a multinational company?

Coming into the role, I already understood Filipinos on a cultural level. I spoke the language, and can relate to people quickly. I have an established supportive network that I can count on here. Filipinos are very warm and friendly and in general, are optimistic. We embrace and welcome diversity, and within Roche we have a diverse workforce. Having worked in many different markets around the world, I was able to bring in an outside perspective in how we work. And importantly, proactively link the local affiliate to the wider Roche network. In the last 2 years, I have had successes in sending employees on long-term and short-term assignments globally. Investing in people's development is a key priority at Roche, and we see active transfer of talent allows for increased learning and capability.

In terms of Roche's portfolio, where do you see the most growth opportunities in the Philippines?

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At the end of 2015, one of the strategic changes that I made was to focus on innovation. In the past years, we have seen significant growth in our medicines via enabling access. There remain many more Filipino patients who can potentially benefit from these innovations. For a long time, Roche

has led in oncology but we realize that many more large and able organizations are increasing their strength in this disease area. Our job is to be able to educate doctors and patients on the differences of medicines so that they can make the appropriate decisions for treatment. We take a very scientific approach in this role and every decision that we make is grounded in fact and science

Could you elaborate on what types of innovation you are most looking forward to focusing on for Roche in the Philippines?

Having been a part of the global products strategy team and launching an innovative medicine globally, I am aware that our focus remains in developing differentiated medicine that serve an unmet medical need. In oncology, our aspiration is to cure more patients with cancer. We innovate by continuously finding ways to improve patient outcomes. Roche recently received approval in the US and EU for our breakthrough medicines and line extensions of our current portfolio. We are excited to bring these into the Philippines as well.

Beyond medicine, innovation also relates to how we work. I believe that innovation does not only have to be cultivating an idea from the inside, but also in the ability to bring in great ideas from outside. That is why I support the movement and exchange of employees in order to bring in new perspectives and ideas. I encourage my employees to leverage the Roche network, proactively reach out to their counterparts and colleagues in other affiliates and the regional and global teams. It is highly possible that opportunities and challenges we have locally have been addressed elsewhere. At Roche in the Philippines, we are a smaller group relative to other markets and that forces us to be more resourceful in how we approach how we work.

McKinsey & Company recently rated the Roche Philippines Patient Access Program as one of the best in the world. What are the goals and ambitions of this project?

The goal of the project is to continue to find sustainable ways to enable access of our medicines to patients. A large part of the program involves taking in to account patients' economic ability to pay. The program is further optimized by leveraging funding sources available locally. This allows for potentially extending treatments in ways that the patients can afford more.

What are some of the challenges in expanding access that are not always evident?

In emerging markets such as the Philippines, there remains great opportunity to educate key stakeholders on the value of innovation. Often, access is equated to price. Time and again, and even locally, data shows that access is not increased by reducing prices. In addition, we continue to find ways to transfer the benefits of enabling access to patients. This includes administration of the patient support programs ourselves.

During your tenure as General Manager, what has been your greatest accomplishment?

There are still many things that I want to accomplish here locally, but if I were to name what I am most proud of so far, it would be having built and developed a team that is well aligned with the vision and the ambitions of the company. We have clarity in our direction and focus of our business, and importantly, we have the right people. My team and I come to work every day because we are excited about what we do. One of the reasons I came back to the Philippines was to have a chance to lead an organization that can have increasing impact locally. I hope that this is how my legacy will be viewed.

What is your vision for 2020 for Roche in the Philippines?

Roche by 2020 will serve at least double the number of patients who can benefit from our medicines. World-wide the company is launching more drugs, and in the next 24 months we will be launching

new medicines and line extensions in the Philippines as well, and we are looking for ways to accelerate the process here. To me, revenue is an outcome, however, what we are truly focused on is the number of patients that can potentially benefit from our m

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