

Interview with Erika Koppers, COO & GM, Roche SA

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You have worked at Roche for several years as Business unit Manager. Therefore you are familiar with the strategy of the company and the intricacies of the job. The new challenges for you will probably be in terms of your managing responsibilities. How did you adapt to your new position?

I began my career at Roche as a Medical Representative and have had an extremely exciting and stimulating career. I am very fortunate in that I have had the opportunity to gain a vast amount of knowledge and experience from various marketing, sales and leadership positions and from my colleagues. I believe that this, together with my knowledge of and passion for, our local affiliate our people and the market is what will put me in good stead to take on the responsibilities and deliver on the expectations of this role. While the transition is challenging, it is extremely exciting.

Would you say there is match between your own beliefs and values and the company's philosophy?

Absolutely! I feel perfectly aligned with our Roche values of passion, integrity and courage and believe my many years of service pay testimony to my fit with the Roche culture. I tend to be an all or nothing kind of person - I am either fully committed or not at all. I have a great passion for making a difference and when you see the difference that our products make, I have to say it is nothing less than inspiring

Will you stay in line with the company's strategy or have you defined new objectives for the company?

Innovation is core to our Roche strategy. It's what we do and, I guess it's who we are. For us at Roche innovating healthcare goes beyond just delivering our innovative medicines to the market. It encompasses a passion for ensuring patients get access to our life changing products. As an innovative pharmaceutical company, I believe it is our obligation to do our very best to ensure that patients get the opportunity to benefit from our products. This will remain key focus for our strategies and efforts going forward in 2012.

Personalised Healthcare (PHC) remains another key element in our Roche strategy. Our vision is to take patients from precise diagnosis to targeted therapy. This has a great potential to improve medical decision-making and to not only offer clinical benefits for patients but also economic benefits to regulatory authorities and funders.

In addition to this Roche will continue to be a socially responsible company, committed to improving the lives of patients by means providing sponsorship to the Phelophepa trains in addition to a number of other community projects.

Looking at both the diagnostic and Pharma divisions, what growth potential do you see in the South African market for Roche?

With the two pillars of Pharma and Diagnostics working together, Roche is uniquely positioned to deliver and assume leadership in the PHC market. The personalized healthcare concept really differentiates Roche from other typical pharmaceutical companies in the industry.

What are the main priorities on your agenda for 2012?

Patients in need of our innovative products will remain the 1st priority and focus of my agenda in 2012. The 2nd is, driving what we need to do to ensure that we compete in being the "best company to work for" within our industry. I am very grateful to be working with such a dynamic and highly driven professional team of individuals. Our future success is very dependent on making sure we retain and develop these individuals and also on ensuring we are attractive to the people we seek to join us.

You are one of the very few women from the industry that we have met in South Africa. Is it any challenging to be a woman in a male dominated industry?

I definitely wouldn't say that the pharmaceutical industry is dominated by men; in fact it is the opposite, especially at a sales representative and middle management level. However at an executive level this may be the case but we are seeing more and more woman entering into these roles. Do I have an issue with this? No, I can honestly say that it is not an issue for me and in fact it never has been. I am extremely confident that where I am today has little to do with the fact that I am a woman, and a lot to do with what I have achieved, and how I achieved it. The way I look at it, it is not about whether you are a man or a woman, it's about being a leader.

What would be your final message to the readers of Pharmaceutical Executive?

Developing innovative medicines and bringing them into the market has little or no value if the people who really need them can't get to benefit from them. Today there are people living with cancer and HIV. While the healthcare sector has many challenges I believe it's by working together, towards a common cause that we will make the difference.

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