

# Interview with Safia Rizvi, Managing Director, UCB India

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**been appointed Managing Director for the first time in your career.**

**How did your first year with UCB India go so far?**

My first year at UCB has gone very well. Our business has grown in this period ahead of the Pharma market in India. My job as MD of UCB India has been both challenging and rewarding.

I joined UCB in May of 2010 and for first 8 months worked from Brussels. The experience of working remotely was interesting to say the least. We utilized technology to communicate and manage the business remotely. Given the fact that I was new to UCB, my time in Brussels enabled me to learn the organization and build relationships with my global colleagues. While I learned a lot about India and Indian Pharmaceutical business in the first 8 months, the learning has been very steep in the last 4 months that I have spent in India. It has been a period of fast paced learning, very busy but also very exhilarating.

India is a place where both functional guidance and emotional support, energy and leadership on the work floor are necessary. Actual physical presence allowed me to be part of the team, part of the drive and energy that defines UCB India and to provide guidance to people at a personal level throughout the company. I was taking a new role with a new company in a country with an entirely new work culture and this was a learning experience in itself.

In India one key to success is being quick and nimble: fast paced decision making. The decisions you make and the processes that you are required to follow are different. It has been a fun challenge for me to learn new ways of doing things, adapt to a new business culture and to realize the potential of the India market. I'm excited to be in India right now and to be part of the rise of the Indian Tiger.

**Some of the MNCs obviously have an international reputation but nevertheless prefer to be considered as a local company in India. How do you want UCB India to be perceived?**

As you know, UCB is a global biopharma focused on severe diseases with operations in more than 40 countries and global revenue of ~ 3.2 billion in 2010. UCB has operations in more than 40 countries worldwide, UCB is a leader in Epilepsy as well as antibody research

UCB has been in India for decades. UCB India company is managed by Indians and focused on serving the needs of Indian patients. Every employee of UCB India understands that our first duty is to our patients. UCB India is focused on developing products that are relevant to and suitable for the Indian market and also making sure that Indian patients has access to our medicine for severe diseases such as epilepsy, Parkinson, Lupus and other such illnesses.

We are also interested in developing relationships and partnerships with other companies to make

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that happen.

In terms of the quality of our products and our people we maintain global and MNC standards. Here we do not compromise. This is true for our promotional practices and code of conduct as well. We follow UCB's global code of conduct and compliance guideline along with Medical Council of India guidelines and other regulations that Indian regulatory bodies have defined. So we are a global Multinational that exists in India to serve Indians with global standards.

Additionally, we do not want to be measured by our market share and would much rather be measured by every patient that we serve.

### **How important is India for the Group worldwide now?**

India is a very important part of the global UCB business. We currently have 15 drugs for allergy, vertigo, cough, cold, anxiety and epilepsy and in India UCB is also developing drugs not only for epilepsy but also lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, osteoporosis and fractured healing. In 2014 UCB will launch a drug for Parkinson's in India

We are very bullish on India as we feel India is going to be a major component of the UCB business worldwide. In fact UCB's CEO, Roch Doliveux, has visited India many times over the last few years. We understand that India's needs are different from other regions of the world. This requires a commitment to focus not only on products but also to take our medicines to our patients as well as help them with our unique patient support groups.

India also has tremendous potential in terms of innovation and talent. Developing the market in India is an immense challenge but it also offers tremendous opportunity to be truly patient centric, to devise novel approaches that reach deep into the community and to provide medicines and patient support programs that match the needs that are currently unmet.

Up until now, the West was considered the hub of innovation and then those new innovations "trickled down" to people in the East including India. Things have changed, and the industry definitely considers India as a place that can convert new and novel ideas into reality and which can be valuable to the rest of the world. We certainly believe that is true and want to be part of that process.

One of the key strengths of the people of India is that they are extremely creative and resourceful. Until now the Indian pharmaceutical industry has been more focused on generics. Now there is an opportunity to develop new medicines that are relevant for India's needs and are also relevant to the rest of the world. UCB and I are of course keen to be part of this next phase. It won't be easy but it will be exciting. It will require a new partnership between public and private sector to turn the focus more on innovation.

While the Indian government has in the past supported the generic model that enabled Indian companies to reap financial rewards without investing either time or resources in original research, India now has a different role to play in the world economy . It is well on its way to becoming a leading economic power and with this comes the responsibility of leadership on many levels including more advanced knowledge based economy, regulations that support this knowledge based growth and an appropriate framework that incentivizes true innovation. This would unlock the tremendous creativity and potential of Indian scientists in India.

### **How will you, in practice, capitalize on these strengths and capabilities of India?**

Apart from our marketing operations, UCB India also has a manufacturing facility in Gujarat where we make our own products in APIs and finished formulations and also provide allergy, vertigo and epilepsy drugs to patients across India.

We also have our global IT facility in Bangalore. Furthermore, we are also conducting a number of clinical trials in the country. We are thus fully integrated. From our perspective, there are tremendous

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opportunities in India. India has a strong pool of talent that we are leveraging in all aspects of our Indian business from clinical development to manufacturing to commercial activities. From time to time, we also rotate this talent in our global operations in different parts of the world.

India is today seeing a reverse brain drain. Two decades ago Indian talent left for opportunities in the West now the direction has been reversed. This offers a unique opportunity for MNCs to benefit from the brain power of Indians who are not just inherently intelligent but understand the global culture of innovation and discovery.

### **Do you have any examples?**

As a CNS-focused company, UCB worldwide has delivered breakthrough products in epilepsy. Firstly, we have brought these groundbreaking products to India. Secondly, in addition to selling these products alone, we have implemented innovative programs that have been tailored to the Indian market. As our goal is not only to provide pharmaceutical solutions but also non pharma patient and care takers support solutions we have a program called "Live beyond epilepsy" in India. This is a strictly non-promotional patient support program run by professional counselors and doctors. It is completely separate from our commercial operations. Through this program UCB has provided counseling support to a few thousand Epilepsy patients and their care takers. The counseling includes various methods of coping with the disease, managing the disease and encouraging adherence to therapy. This program is run in partnership with the doctor because he/she is most knowledgeable about the patient's disease, circumstances and their needs.

We also have another program called "Hope" which stands for Helping Other People with Epilepsy. It is a platform for newly diagnosed epilepsy patients to connect with those that previously lived with the disease. Each month, we have between 20 and 60 "hope meetings" across India to help people with epilepsy. In 2011, 171 meetings have been conducted with an aim of touching as many lives as possible by selling HOPE to the patients.

In India particularly, epilepsy is perceived differently than in other nations. It carries a social stigma not only for the individual but for the entire family. There is a lot of work that remains to be done to de-stigmatize epilepsy in India and have it treated for what it is - an illness. Public awareness and education is as crucial as the availability of the best drugs. We therefore have a large educational effort as part of our outreach programs.

Since children account for a large part of our patients we want to help change the scenario. Our efforts include sponsoring epileptic kids from the lower strata and encouraging them to attend school and providing scholarship. We will continue to strive to reach out to all such children who require our help.

Through these different platforms, we have heard many moving stories about Indian patients.. One stands out in my mind. It is about an old poor Indian woman, who had an adult son with epilepsy. His many seizures had impaired his brain function to such an extent that he was considered retarded. He could not feed or clothe himself. For him the disease was both a physical and a social disability. His mother did not give up and took him to many doctors who prescribed a wide range of older generation epilepsy drugs, which in his case did not work. Finally, one doctor in Bangalore, told the mother that a new drug was now available and the woman did all in her power to get that medicine for her son. The doctor prescribed Keppra, which did control the seizures. Since then he has lived a normal life and even holds a job. Hearing such stories makes me very proud of the company I work for. Every patient matters!

### **Do you feel that other companies in India spend sufficient effort on such initiatives?**

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There are a lot of companies that have been making a significant effort to implement meaningful initiatives. UCB India is definitely not alone in this sense, but we have truly aligned our financial rewards with the benefit of our patients. We put our money where our mouth is.

As I was a scientist working in drug discovery and development I understand what it takes to discover and develop a drug. Considering that you fail 99.9% of the time, a drug that finally does make it through the process will not be of any value if it sits on a shelf somewhere. Unless the doctors know about the medicine and unless the patient can reach it, it is of no use. While representatives are generally being considered as sales people, it is these people that create the access to the medicines by carrying information to the doctors and by making sure that the medicine is available at the chemists shop. They can make the difference and save people's lives, improve quality of lives which is a key aspect that keeps me and my team motivated.

**The 3 new key products Cimzia, Vimpat and Neupro are also being brought to patients worldwide. To what extent has UCB India been able to capitalize on these 3 new brands?**

Globally UCB's focus is on severe diseases: CNS and Immunology. As an affiliate of UCB, our goals are aligned with UCB global.

We are also planning to have these products in our portfolio and move towards becoming a specialty bio-pharma company.

Our efforts to discover novel drugs are an ongoing process. Vimpat is one such drug that has emerged from our continuous exhaustive research.

Vimpat will be launched later this year while Cimzia launch in India is currently being evaluated. Neupro is undergoing clinical trials in India and we intend to launch it in early 2014. Additionally Indian patients are included in global trial for Emab our Lupus drug.

The Indian market is quite different from the rest of the world, where companies can offer a few products. In India, we have kept our old portfolio of innovative products that serve the needs of Dermatologist, Allergist, Peds and ENTs. UCB India is unique in the sense that 98% of our portfolio is of research-based products. We do not have a majority of branded generics.

For all of our future products, UCB India is now making sure that Indian patients are included in UCB's global clinical trials, in order to simultaneously launch new products in India and other world markets. The gap between the global and Indian launch will therefore be minimal in the future, which is quite an exciting evolution for our operations here.

UCB has a very exciting pipeline that is in various phases of development which includes medicine for Lupus, fracture healing and epilepsy. We plan to bring all of those novel treatments to India for people of India.

**On a personal note and looking back at your first year with UCB India now, what are you most proud of?**

India is the land of my ancestors and is the place of my heritage. This is great opportunity for me to serve my people while gaining tremendous experience for my professional growth.

India is a place that teaches you to be very humble and even your pride takes the form of humility because it is so easy to see one's privileges around here.

It is a privilege for me to lead a team that is driven and talented and so committed. I am proud of my team. Secondly, I am also very proud of working for UCB in India because it is among the most respected organizations that follows ethical business and promotional practices.

Third and most importantly, I am proud of our relentless focus on patients.. Our efforts to demonstrate patient centricity have been recognized by the Indian business community. We have recently received, the Indy's award (see attached for description of the award) Award for our Live Beyond Epilepsy program as the best CSR program.

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Of course I feel very proud when I hear of the success of our patient outreach programs and the value of our drugs in treating patients. I am truly thrilled when I hear stories such as the one of the patient from Bangalore I mentioned earlier.

### **What are your main priorities right now?**

As with our parent company, we aspire to be biopharmaceutical leaders focusing on severe diseases.

Key priorities

One: Grow UCB India presence particularly in CNS and establish unquestionable leadership in CNS therapy area particularly in epilepsy for which UCB is recognized globally.

We want to be recognized as the company offering best scientific support and most current information to doctors treating patients with central nervous system diseases. We of course would leverage UCB global in-house knowledge of epilepsy and Parkinson and our vast network of key opinion leaders in US, Europe and India for assisting the medical community in India.

Two: To bring our global products to India as soon as possible and, ideally, even at the same time as the global launch.

Three: To make the Indian patient more "visible" and develop improved and creative patient support programs. We want to be the number 1 patient-centric company in India. By focusing on patients and making sure that every Indian patient who needs our medicine gets it, we will naturally grow in terms of revenues.

And last but not the least, we aim to be the employer of choice for work force both in and outside of UCB.

### **Do you have a final message you would like to send out the readers of Pharmaceutical Executive?**

One point I would like to emphasize is that, worldwide pharmaceutical promotional practices have evolved over the years India the Medical Council of India (MCI) guidelines have come also last year. I am very proud that UCB is known as company most compliant with these guidelines. We are proud of our strong no-compromise stance on ethics.

For me, being and working in India is an exciting opportunity for both professional and personal growth.

I consider myself very fortunate to have this opportunity and serve the people in the land of my fore fathers. I am indeed India Positive.

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