

# Monica Palomanes – General Manager, Roche Pharma Mexico

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Central to our organisational culture is a shared purpose: to serve patients and support the healthcare system

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*Monica Palomanes, General Manager of Roche Mexico, discusses her journey within the company and the shift from traditional sales to a collaborative approach with Patient Journey Partners. She addresses challenges in access and diagnosis within Mexico's fragmented healthcare system, while recognising the country's potential for clinical research due to the impressive pool of medical and research professionals in the country. Palomanes also emphasises Roche's commitment to ensuring timely access to innovative treatments in the therapeutic areas with the heaviest burden on society.*

## **What has your career journey been like, and how did it lead you to your current role as General Manager of Roche Mexico?**

I've been with Roche for over 11 years, and throughout that time, I've had the privilege of working in a wide range of functions. My academic background is in biochemistry, which I studied in Spain, and I later completed my master's thesis in Sweden, focusing on basic research. After that, I transitioned into the pharmaceutical industry, where I've held roles in areas such as medical, marketing and commercial operations. I've been fortunate to gain experience in several key areas of pharma, which has given me a well-rounded understanding of the industry.

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Becoming a General Manager has long been a goal of mine. I've always been drawn to leadership roles because they allow me to gain a comprehensive view of the business and the teams I work with. The opportunity to take on this role in Mexico was particularly appealing. Mexico, and the whole Latam region is a region full of complexity and potential, and there is still much work to be done, but that's exactly what excites me. I saw this as a chance not only to grow professionally but also to make a meaningful contribution to healthcare in Mexico, where real opportunities exist to drive change. Leading this challenge allows me to combine my past experiences and channel them alongside my team into a demanding and rewarding ecosystem.

### **What has been Roche's trajectory in Mexico, and how do you view the company's position and future prospects here?**

Roche has a long and significant history in Mexico, which has always been a key market for the company due to its large population and strategic global position. Our presence was solidified many years ago when we acquired the local company Syntex, making Roche one of the largest pharmaceutical companies in the country. Mexico's importance to Roche is evident from its strong connection to our global headquarters in Basel, and this relationship continues to thrive.

Looking to the future, Roche sees tremendous opportunities in Mexico, especially given the current economic and geopolitical landscape. The country is seen as a land of opportunity, with a stable economy, balanced currency, and a clear commitment from the government to improve healthcare for its citizens. This favourable environment allows us to deepen our commitment to Mexico and continue making a significant impact in the healthcare sector.

### **How does the current political and economic climate in Mexico affect Roche's goals, particularly in healthcare?**

Mexico distinguishes itself with a relatively stable macroeconomic environment. Key indicators suggest that Mexico is well-positioned for growth. The country's openness to global trade is a significant asset, and the government seems willing to embrace the benefits of nearshoring. Additionally, Mexico has signed 14 free trade agreements with 50 countries and 30 agreements for the promotion and reciprocal protection of investments. That sounds to me like a very intentional decision to be connected with the world and grow.

Under the leadership of President Claudia Sheinbaum, there is a strong alignment between Roche's goals and the government's healthcare vision. The national project "República Sana" clearly focuses on improving healthcare nationwide. While Mexico faces significant challenges in this area, there is a strong willingness from the government to collaborate with key stakeholders, including Roche, to achieve these goals. We are confident that by working together, we can contribute meaningfully to the health and well-being of all Mexicans.

### **What were the main differences between the healthcare systems in Spain and Mexico that influenced your approach as General Manager, and how did you navigate your first days in this new role?**

Stepping into the role of General Manager in Mexico, I immediately recognised the vast differences between the healthcare systems in Spain and Mexico. One of the most striking aspects was the size

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of the country and the complexities this brings to its healthcare landscape. Mexico's market is highly fragmented, with a diverse mix of public and private sectors, each with numerous stakeholders and institutions. This creates a very atomised system, which differs from Spain's more centralised healthcare model that, while regionalised, ensures a high degree of equity across the system

The local dynamics here are unique, and it was crucial for me to gain a deep understanding of how things work before implementing any strategic decisions. One of the biggest challenges is the investment in health, which in Mexico has sustained a budget gap of approximately three points of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for two decades.

Despite these challenges, the public healthcare sector remains our top priority, as it covers the most of the population. At the same time, the private market is also important due to the increasing role of private insurance in the country.

### **What therapeutic areas is Roche prioritising in Mexico, and how is the company addressing key healthcare needs in these fields?**

Roche's commitment is firmly rooted in making a meaningful impact where there are significant gaps in healthcare. We focus on areas where we can introduce innovative solutions that can truly change patient outcomes. Oncology remains a central area for us. Although we are no longer the sole leader in this field, our dedication to transforming cancer care continues. For example, in breast cancer, we have introduced Phesgo®, a combination of Herceptin®, and Perjeta®, in a subcutaneous form. This innovation allows patients to receive their treatment in just 10 minutes, reducing the need for extended hospital stays. This translates into savings for the health systems and, more importantly, in time savings and improved quality of life for Mexican patients.

Neurology has become a significant growth area for Roche globally, driven by the success of Ocrevus®, our groundbreaking treatment for multiple sclerosis, which has provided exceptional results for patients over the past 11 years, globally; and since 2018, when it was approved in Mexico. Also, in neurology, our drug Evrysdi® is making a significant impact, improving the lives of children and young adults living with spinal muscular atrophy (SMA). Here, we also innovate in drug delivery mechanisms with an orally bioavailable molecule.

We are also firmly committed to addressing ophthalmological conditions, particularly in Mexico where diabetes-related eye diseases are prevalent. In Mexico, 14.6 million people live with diabetes, and between 30% - 36% of them develop some form of retinopathy. This has an enormous impact on patients and their caregivers, and even the country as a whole, in social and economic terms. Vabysmo®, our treatment for diabetic macular edema and wet age-related macular degeneration, was approved last year in Mexico. This new drug allows spacing out doses contributes to more efficient care, benefiting patients and helping alleviate the burden on the healthcare system. Looking ahead, we are re-entering the cardiometabolic landscape focusing on obesity and diabetes, which are critical health challenges in Mexico. Leveraging our expertise in diagnostics, we aim to deliver innovative therapies in these areas, addressing some of the leading causes of death nationwide. Diabetes in Mexico is the third cause of death; it is possible that more than one hundred thousand people die each year from this disease.

### **In the context of oncology, how is Roche addressing the cancer burden in Mexico, particularly when it comes to improving care for breast cancer patients?**

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Roche has been deeply engaged with the Mexican healthcare system for many years, striving to improve cancer care through meaningful collaboration and innovation. Although Mexico currently lacks a formal National Cancer Plan, we remain committed to advocating for its development, as we believe it would bring significant benefits to both patients and the healthcare system. Our focus has been especially strong in breast cancer, where we have established ourselves as a key partner. Through our long-standing collaborations with healthcare providers, we have worked to enhance early diagnosis and expand access to advanced treatments.

Breast cancer is the leading cause of death in the country, and Globocan estimates that by 2045, the incidence of breast cancer in Mexico will grow by 53.3% to reach 47,474 cases. And mortality will increase by 71.1% in the same year. We cannot accept these mortality rates. One of the greatest challenges is the late diagnosis of cancers, which significantly impacts survival rates. In response, we are actively supporting initiatives that promote earlier detection, particularly in breast cancer, where early intervention can make a critical difference. When scientific evidence backs innovation, another necessary mindset change is to use it first. Do not leave it until traditional options are exhausted; it may already be too late for patients. Innovation first, in early stages can save many lives.

Roche is dedicated to working closely with healthcare stakeholders to co-create solutions that will ultimately reduce the cancer burden and improve patient outcomes across Mexico.

### **What challenges does the company face in the approval process for new products, and how are you addressing these obstacles?**

Roche faces significant challenges regarding the approval timeline for new products in Mexico. Historically, patients in Mexico have experienced delays in receiving innovative treatments, often waiting more than four years longer than their counterparts in Latin America. This discrepancy concerns Roche and, more importantly, the patients who are in need of these therapies. Although we have observed improvements in recent years, there remains a substantial opportunity for further progress.

We are committed to fostering ongoing dialogue with government stakeholders to enhance the approval process. Our strategy involves engaging with the healthcare authorities early in the development phase to better plan for future product launches, especially in high-demand areas such as obesity treatment. We are determined to ensure that our vision of timely access to innovative therapies for patients in Mexico becomes a reality. Collaboration with all relevant stakeholders is crucial to this endeavour.

### **Many MNCs we've interviewed are focused on expanding clinical trials. How is Roche advancing clinical trial development in Mexico?**

Mexico has become a key focus for clinical development at Roche, and we are working diligently to improve the clinical trial environment here. While regulatory frameworks can sometimes be challenging regarding approval times, we have established an open dialogue with the authorities to seek to improve them. Consistency and certainty in approval times are crucial for Mexico to become the clinical research hub it seems destined to be.

A unique aspect of Roche's approach in Mexico is our commitment to including public hospitals in every clinical trial. This focus on public institutions is specific to Mexico, where the inclusion of public

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sites in clinical research has historically been more challenging than in other countries. To support this, we have been actively investing in the education and training of new researchers, while also raising awareness about the importance of clinical research throughout the country. This includes expanding our reach in more than 20 states, in alignment with the government's goal to regionalise and decentralise healthcare access.

### **How is Roche supporting the digitalisation of healthcare in Mexico, and how does this align with governmental objectives?**

Digitalisation is increasingly vital in modern healthcare, and Roche has long understood the transformative power of data to improve patient care. We are very interested in the decisive steps the new Mexican government has outlined in such a short time to implement digitalisation in regulatory processes, healthcare monitoring, public procurement, and supply.

You can't improve what you can't measure fully applies to healthcare outcomes, and in that sense, electronic patient records can make a difference, not only in terms of traceability and efficiency in care but also in generating data on adherence to treatments and results of new therapies.

Our efforts include helping to establish essential infrastructure, such as electronic patient records, which are currently lacking. By contributing to these developments, we aim to ensure that digital tools are effectively utilised to improve healthcare delivery. However, progress can vary significantly between private and public hospitals. Nonetheless, Roche remains steadfast in its commitment to working closely with the healthcare sector to accelerate digitalisation efforts, which will ultimately benefit patients across the country.

### **What challenges does Roche foresee in Mexico's healthcare landscape, particularly regarding access to innovation and diagnosis?**

Access to accurate diagnosis and innovative treatments will pose significant challenges in Mexico's healthcare system. Access is vital for delivering new therapies, but it is contingent upon patients receiving timely and precise diagnoses. Unfortunately, many Mexican patients face obstacles due to inadequate infrastructure and a convoluted patient journey, making it difficult to navigate the healthcare system. We know that the government is not only aware of this, but planning a comprehensive strategy to address this. In that sense, from Roche, with our two divisions, Diagnostics and Pharmaceutical, we are in a unique position to contribute with these efforts.

Another critical issue is the fragmentation of the healthcare system. With multiple institutions involved, each having its own processes, the path to access becomes increasingly complex. Consequently, obtaining final access to treatments necessitates navigating numerous hurdles and engaging in extensive discussions with various stakeholders.

### **How does the company approach the purchasing process in Mexico, and what strategies are employed to enhance collaboration and negotiation with healthcare institutions?**

Roche recognises the importance of a structured purchasing process in Mexico, facilitating negotiations between healthcare institutions and pharmaceutical companies. This centralised

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approach is beneficial, as it involves collaborating with hospitals and institutions to forecast their needs for the coming years. By planning effectively—often one to two years in advance—healthcare providers can engage in informed discussions with companies like Roche regarding necessary investments in treatments.

While challenges remain, this organised framework allows for more predictable and productive negotiations. By fostering open communication and collaboration among stakeholders, Roche aims to enhance access to innovative therapies and ensure that patients' needs are met effectively and efficiently.

### **How has Roche's internal culture and operational model evolved over the past two years, particularly in relation to sales strategies and customer engagement in Mexico?**

In recent years, there has been a paradigm shift in the health sector due to the exponential advancement of technology and the availability of vital health data in real time. From the traditional model of medical care with a reactive approach focused on products and the treatment of diseases, there was a more comprehensive approach that prioritised the integration of prevention services, early diagnosis, personalised attention, and the use of advanced technology in a manner proactive and predictive, improving people's quality of life and providing more efficient, personalised and effective medical care. That is why our engagement model is changing. We are moving away from the traditional model to privilege working in a network to co-create solutions because in Roche, we dream with a vision that's making our customer experience as transformative as our science and being recognised for consistently creating customer experiences that are seamless, innovative and impactful, that's why we embrace the omnichannel strategy: we want to be present in multiple channels, face-to-face and digital, to meet the changing needs of professionals and offer personalised experiences aligned with their preferences.

Another significant difference in our commitment of being partners of the patients, the health professionals and the health systems is that instead of relying on conventional sales representatives, we introduced the role of Patient Journey Partners (PJPs), two years ago. These professionals partner closely with all stakeholders directly touching the patient journey (in a given therapeutic or disease area), gaining a deep understanding of their needs in order to connect Roche's capabilities to co-create meaningful solutions for the patients.

Central to our organisational culture is a shared purpose: to serve patients and support the healthcare system. This ambitious mission drives our teams, fostering a strong sense of intrinsic motivation that often outweighs traditional incentives. We emphasise the importance of understanding the healthcare ecosystem, recognising that effective collaboration and navigation within this system are vital for delivering innovation.

### **What insights can you share about Roche's leadership culture and the perception of the pharmaceutical industry in Mexico?**

Our leadership philosophy emphasises enabling and empowering teams, with leaders acting selflessly to support the success of others. This unique approach differentiates Roche from many other industries and is a point of pride for us.

Additionally, Roche is deeply committed to the principles of diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I). 60% of the colleagues in Roche Mexico are women, and this mirrors very well the situation of the

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healthcare sector in Mexico, in which [7 out of 10 people employed in the industry are women](#). However, our focus extends beyond gender diversity to encompass all forms of diversity, as we recognise that a diverse culture nurtures innovation, enriches our organisation, and leads to better outcomes.

Regarding the perception of the pharmaceutical industry in Mexico, there is always room for improvement. At Roche, we walk the talk and we enable and empower every Roche employee to bring innovation for patients in a way that protects our reputation, guarantees our license to operate, and creates trust amongst our stakeholders.

Finally, I want to remark on the impressive pool of medical and research professionals in the country; their commitment to science and medical research has allowed us to develop, only this year, 68 clinical trials in Mexico, three of them (one is about to obtain regulatory authorisation) in phase I. That means that Mexico is part of this "exclusive" club of countries with the human expertise and infrastructure to conduct the early stages of any clinical trial. This strategic positioning gives us optimism about the opportunities and reinforces our commitment to expanding these capabilities further.

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