

Sampada Gosavi – General Manager & Managing Director India, Astellas Pharma



Over the next three years, our focus is set on three fundamental elements to drive growth and impact: portfolio transformation, capability building, and expanding the HCP network

12.02.2024

Tags:

[India](#), [Astellas](#), [Strategy](#), [Diversity](#)

Sampada Gosavi explains how she has led a transformation of Astellas's operations in India to launch innovative products in oncology and women's health, coupled with a commitment to building internal capabilities. With a hypergrowth phase anticipated, Astellas will nevertheless need to continue to navigate India's regulatory environment and engage in strategic market penetration efforts, all with the goal of extending the reach of its innovative medicines to a broader patient base while maintaining compliance with local regulations.

How have your experiences in diverse roles shaped your leadership approach and preparedness for the complexities of the pharmaceutical industry in India?

My journey in the pharmaceutical and life sciences industry spans nearly 25 years. I have held key positions at companies such as Ranbaxy, Unichem, Abbott, Boehringer-Ingelheim, to name a few. Starting as a medical representative, I gained invaluable insights into sales at the grassroots level. Transitioning from sales to marketing then provided me with a multifaceted view of the industry.

Delving into specialty, market access and patient engagement strategy further enriched my commercial experience. Working across 15 therapy areas, from acute to chronic therapies, deepened my understanding of the dynamic Indian market.

Leading diverse teams and managing multiple roles presented unique challenges, particularly as a female manager. However, overcoming these obstacles reinforced my resilience and adaptability. Additionally, exposure to diverse backgrounds and therapy areas, coupled with mentorship from industry leaders has profoundly influenced my professional approach.

What was the narrative of Astellas in India before your arrival, and upon taking leadership, did you identify specific areas or points to make a significant impact within the local team? How did you approach making a transformative impact on the company's operations in India?

Astellas Pharma has been operating in India for more than a decade, primarily in the transplant space. However, there haven't been any new launches in the country in the last few years. Going forward, I envision a transformative journey for Astellas India, focused on portfolio transformation and capability building. The goal is to bring innovative launches to the country especially in areas like oncology and women's health. The key to this transformation lies in building capabilities, precise execution and recruiting diverse talent to align with the evolving market needs.

Historically, companies, including Astellas, hesitated to bring their latest portfolios to India, citing challenges that made the market seem unappealing. As someone with market experience, what factors traditionally made India less attractive for introducing new portfolios, and how has the landscape evolved?

The Indian pharmaceutical landscape has transformed significantly in the last 15 to 20 years. Previously, challenges related to ease of doing business, regulatory frameworks, and cumbersome approval processes did act as a deterrent for global pharmaceutical companies looking to introduce their latest innovator drugs.

There has been a considerable improvement in the regulatory environment and ease of doing business. The intellectual property (IP) regime has been strengthened, positioning India as a promising market for new portfolios. From 2013 to 2021, close to 70 innovator brands launched in India, indicating a positive shift in the country's perception within the global pharmaceutical landscape.

With enhanced regulations and robust IP protection, coupled with a growing pool of talented professionals, India is increasingly becoming an attractive destination for pharmaceutical innovation.

Considering the emphasis on local priorities and the out-of-pocket nature of healthcare expenses in India, multinational companies face challenges in bringing innovative medicines to the country. How do you navigate discussions with the government, which seems focused on local priorities, and what strategies do you employ to emphasize the value of innovations?

While the government prioritizes local healthcare needs, multinational companies recognize the global impact of their innovations and strive to address unmet needs worldwide. Despite India being primarily an out-of-pocket market, we prioritize patient access through a multifaceted approach.

The challenge extends beyond pricing concerns. Patients often look at only pricing, however pricing is only one aspect of access. To address this, Astellas, like many other multinationals, implements

patient support programs and access initiatives. These initiatives are designed to ensure that patients not only have access to innovative medicines but also benefit from value-added services.

Our objective is to create a synergy where patient needs are met, while also ensuring sustained investment in the continuous development of the innovative pipeline.

In a market like India, where healthcare expenses are predominantly out-of-pocket, can you elaborate on how Astellas tailors its patient access initiatives?

The primary approach is to establish a network of healthcare professionals (HCPs). This enables effective communication regarding the scientific basis of our innovations, emphasizing the significance of each molecule within its respective therapy area. In my view, the essence of innovation lies in the clarity of scientific communication and patient awareness, which is paramount to our strategy.

Could you elaborate on how Astellas adapts its global regulatory strategies to align with the specific requirements of the Indian regulatory framework? Additionally, given the vast and diverse market landscape in India, what strategic considerations does Astellas employ in its go-to-market strategy, especially in terms of salesforce and market penetration?

Astellas adheres to any country's regulatory framework in which it operates. Compliance and strict adherence to local processes are critical in navigating the intricacies of the Indian regulatory landscape.

In terms of the go-to-market strategy, leveraging India's vast talent pool is crucial. However, comprehensive specialty experience in areas such as oncology or women's health, is concentrated among a limited few. The strategic choices include deciding on the level of market penetration, focusing on metros and tier one towns.

Also important are strategic partnerships with Indian companies to extend access down the pyramid. The collaboration between multinationals and Indian companies, particularly in diabetes, heart failure, and hypertension, is gaining prominence. These partnerships enable multinationals to access a broader patient base, while Indian companies benefit from innovative products, thereby enhancing the overall innovation quotient.

Reflecting on the past year with Astellas in India and considering the next three years, what are the three key elements shaping the company's journey? How does Astellas plan to navigate the growth trajectory, especially in the context of the evolving role of India within the APAC region?

Over the next three years, our focus is set on three fundamental elements to drive growth and impact. Firstly, the company is committed to portfolio transformation, aiming to introduce innovative products, with multiple launches planned in areas such as oncology and women's health. Secondly, there is a strong emphasis on capability building, ensuring the organization is equipped with the right talent and resources for the successful launch and growth of these innovative products. This is crucial in preparing for the hypergrowth phase anticipated with the upcoming launches. Thirdly, expand the HCP network by actively reaching out to more doctors, particularly in therapy

areas aligned with the upcoming product launches. This approach underscores the company's dedication to engaging with healthcare professionals and effectively communicating the scientific nuances of our innovative products.

Regarding the role of India within the Asia Pacific region, Astellas sees India on the cusp of significant growth, driven by the planned launches and the three key growth drivers highlighted earlier.

In terms of diversity and inclusion, the gender ratio has nearly doubled from the previous year, touching 30 percent. The commitment to fostering diversity and inclusion is a priority, and we aim to further improve these metrics.

[See more interviews](#)
