

Novartis Canada

Getting a Global Perspective

Talking with Jacques Dessureault, Vice-President, Cardiovascular and Metabolism Business Franchise, Novartis Pharmaceuticals Canada



You recently spent close to two years in a senior marketing role at Novartis Global, as part of your development plan with the company to expose you to new challenges. What was your specific role?

I was responsible for leading the team that managed the company's respiratory product portfolio, which is a mix of inline and pipeline products in different stages of development. In this role, I led commercial input into Novartis' global strategic business plan for the respiratory disease area. I was responsible for the optimal management of the respiratory portfolio, as well as for leading the business development and licensing function.

I also worked at preparing the launch of a new, innovative biologic drug in the U.S. market and prepared the European market for the launch of this drug as well. Further, I led the commercial group's input into the development plan of new molecules and led global branding strategy for new and in-market brands. It was a very interesting and dynamic position that gave me valuable insight into working in a global environment where I could also bring a local country perspective to the global plans.

Please review your career path, leading to your appointment as Vice-President, Cardiovascular and Metabolism Business Franchise, at Novartis Pharmaceuticals Canada.

I graduated from the University of Quebec in Montreal in 1986 with a Business Degree in Marketing and Management Information Systems. I started my career in marketing and sales with the computer industry, but then moved to Glaxo as a sales representative. Since then, I have had the opportunity to work in most of the key areas of marketing and sales.

After my time as a rep, I went on to work in market research, then brand management, district sales management and training. I then moved to Sandoz to be Sales Director for Quebec and Atlantic provinces, which gave me the opportunity to manage the sales strategies for five different provinces.

After the merger of Sandoz and Ciba Geigy that created Novartis in 1997, I took on the position of Director, Sales and Marketing Operations in the newly-merged company. My role was to build a best-in-class marketing and sales operation.

I eventually moved on to become Director, Commercial Operations, responsible for overseeing all commercial partners for the company in Canada. After this, I took on the position of Marketing Director in Primary Care, where I led the launch of three brands and oversaw new product development.

During my entire career at Novartis, it was clear there would be a succession of opportunities through which I would be able to hone my skills and develop new ones. This was part of the organizational talent review process at the company and I knew my development plan would eventually lead to an international assignment. That is precisely what happened in 2003, when I moved to the position of Head, Global Respiratory Marketing.



Cardiovascular and Metabolism Business Franchise Members (*standing from left to right*): Jean-Michel Carpentier, Linda Assouline, Ian Johnson and Jacques Dessureault (*seated*).

Would you recommend that all senior managers include an international assignment at some point in their career?

Definitely. All pharmaceutical companies have become global in their scope and operating in a global company provides opportunities and challenges for markets like Canada. The best way to take advantage of opportunities and minimize challenges is to work on both the local and global sides of the business.

As a senior manager in this industry, it is a very valuable experience to understand how early product development works, as well as how you can influence product development at a national level. For example, in Canada, we have market access challenges that some other countries do not have and we need data to address these challenges. As a result, understanding of Phase 2 and Phase 3 study designs is critical to the success of the local market access plans.

With this knowledge, you can be proactive in providing input from a local market like Canada and influencing global strategies. Gaining this global perspective gives you the upper hand in getting the most out of your global organization and, ultimately, to have the strongest impact on your local market. Having an understanding of this bigger picture is a key asset in managing a local operation.

What were some of the skills you learned in Global Marketing?

From a marketing perspective, I acquired different perspectives on the business, from short- and mid-term focus to longer horizons, from achieving sales and market share targets to creating product life cycle plans and providing input into early product development plans. I also learned a lot about business development and licensing, from the search and evaluation process to the management of global alliances.

I also learned more about leadership. In a local market like Canada, the sales and marketing function leads many of the key activities and one can get to understand most key issues and opportunities.

In a global role, especially as it relates to early product development, the marketing function is more of a “staff” function, where you are a contributor in a global project team, but not in the lead position. You are forced to let go.

Learning to accept that you can no longer be the content expert allows you to take a quantum leap in leadership growth and helps develop skills that are required in higher levels of management. Working in this diverse environment, your success depends on your ability to value diversity and influence people that may not share the same background, language, culture or experiences.



Jacques Dessureault (*right*), in discussion with team members Gordon Cooper (*left*) and Jean-Michel Carpentier (*centre*).

What were some of the challenges you faced in your personal life when you moved to Europe with your family?

One of the key decision drivers to take on a global position was to give my family the opportunity to live abroad and benefit from the adventures of living in Europe. I have two great children. My son and daughter were 11 and eight years old, respectively, when we moved to Switzerland, which are great ages to experience a new culture for the first time.

One of the biggest challenges was the sheer complexity of moving an entire family across the Atlantic into a new life—from finding a home to locating the right school for the children. Fortunately, Novartis provides the support of relocation experts who help with all these challenges.

They also help with other areas of life. Take my wife, Elise, who is a Human Resources professional. Like me, she wanted to expand her international experience by working in Switzerland. Novartis provides a spouse/partner work assistance program for employees on internal rotation. Given her skill set and the opportunity that came up, she found a job with Novartis as well.

Dealing with the challenges of a relocation as you learn to live in a new country and work in a new environment without speaking the local language can be stressful. Looking back, though, this was a very fulfilling experience. My wife and kids now speak German fluently, and my children—who went to international school—have a good command of English. Living in Switzerland also gives you the chance to live in the centre of Europe, 10 minutes away from both France and Germany and about two hours from Italy and Austria, which provides great opportunities to visit different countries.



Jacques Dessureault with his family in the Swiss Alps.

Novartis has been listed as a top employer in Canada by *The Globe & Mail's Report on Business Magazine* and the Number 1 company to work for in Quebec by *Les Affaires Plus* for three years in a row. What is Novartis doing differently?

The primary focus of Novartis is on its people; it is clear that they are the most important asset for the company. Novartis has a culture of showing how people contribute to the success of the company. This is accomplished by providing people with a mix of responsibilities that not only build on their knowledge and strengths, but also stretch them to develop new skills.

I believe Novartis also differs in the emphasis the company puts on leadership development and people management skills. There are strong programs offered by Novartis to help managers work through the "leadership pipeline," going from being an employee, to managing employees, managing people-managers and, finally, to taking on positions of greater responsibility and scope.

Furthermore, Novartis has a strong and structured approach to talent development and succession planning. Having one of the best pipelines in the industry also helps in providing employees with opportunities to grow. Each launch presents employees with hundreds of opportunities, from preparing the market to entrenching the product in the marketplace. All of this has played an important role in Novartis being ranked as a top employer. **CPM**



Novartis Pharmaceuticals Canada Inc. Head Office Building, Dorval, Quebec.