

How To Make a Difference

Addressing Global Public Health Issues

An Interview with Caroline T. Roan,
President, Pfizer Foundation, and Vice President of Corporate Responsibility, Pfizer Inc.

EDITORS' NOTE Before joining Pfizer, Caroline Roan worked at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation as a member of the Foundation's Community Health Team. Prior to this, she was Associate Director of the Center for Interdisciplinary Research on AIDS (CIRA) at Yale University's Department of Epidemiology and Public Health. She also worked as Study Coordinator at Yale University's Department of Internal Medicine. Roan is a member of the Conference



Caroline T. Roan

Board's Corporate Contributions Council and the Lincoln Center Corporate Fund's Leadership Committee. She received her B.A. in sociology and anthropology from Earlham College and her M.P.A. from the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University.

COMPANY BRIEF Headquartered in New York, Pfizer Inc. (www.pfizer.com) increased its global presence through the acquisitions of Warner-Lambert and Pharmacia. In addition, through strategic partnerships and acquisitions of diversified businesses, such as Wyeth, Pfizer has solidified its place as one of the most diversified companies in the global health care industry. Pfizer continues to focus on applying science and the company's global resources to improve health and well-being at every stage of life. Pfizer is also one of the world's largest developers and marketers of vaccines and medicines for livestock and companion animals.

How critical is corporate social responsibility to the culture of Pfizer's brand, and how do you focus those efforts?

For Pfizer, being a socially responsible company and one that is committed to addressing social issues is a part of our mission and our reason for being. We're a health care company – "Working together for a healthier world" is our purpose – and our colleagues expect us to address the needs of patients, both in the U.S. and globally, as well as supporting our local communities. This started when the company was founded more than 150 years ago by two immigrants. The concept of corporate philanthropy didn't exist then, but the two founders provided support to new immigrants.

Is there a clear relationship between the programs you support and Pfizer's business strategy, and is that coordination important?

Absolutely. We aren't a private foundation; we are stewards of shareholder dollars, and believe that the contributions we make from our charitable giving budgets should be investments. So we have a platform called Pfizer Investments in Health. We focus on health because we're a health care company, it builds on our core expertise, and it's a part of a coordinated strategy; what Pfizer contributes to society is beyond just our medicines. We take a full-asset approach to address global public health issues that includes our people, our products, and our funding. They align with and build on the core expertise and therapeutic focus of the company.

Is it critical that those programs follow a global platform?

Absolutely. The programs we support currently operate in 63 countries globally, and we have focused on ensuring that we're supporting Pfizer's brand across the world through all of our programs.

Do you look to partner in many of those areas with nonprofits and NGOs that have the expertise, and does that help you make a greater impact?

Partnering is the reason for our success. We have a core set of expertise as a multinational health care company, but non-governmental organizations and other multilateral organizations also have a critical role to play in addressing health care, and in many cases, are better equipped to provide direct services to patients and communities than we are. So the eight flagship programs that we support are all designed in partnership with non-governmental organizations, and the success of those programs has depended on the selection of those partners and the ongoing dialogue that we have with them.

Have you been happy with the impact your Global Health Fellows program has had, and what is Pfizer's commitment in that area?

We've been thrilled with the impact. We were the first non-consulting firm to launch a skills-based approach to volunteering, and many companies have followed the model. We deploy Pfizer colleagues for up to six months on assignments working with nongovernmental organizations on health care issues. Initially, our thoughts were to address the health care

shortage in developing countries, but our NGO partners not only needed the doctors, nurses, and pharmacists that we have at Pfizer, but they needed the core business skills that have made Pfizer successful, because they frequently don't have easy access to those skills, like finance and HR expertise. So as the program has evolved since 2003, we have seen more interest in the core business skills and getting those colleagues deployed in positions with our NGO partners.

We typically have more interest and applications from colleagues than we do spots. Also, in recruitment of new talent to the company, the global health fellows program is a differentiator and many colleagues are choosing to come to the company because they believe they'll have the opportunity to participate in the program in the future.

Over the past 24 months, with the economic crisis and the impact across all business, how important has it been to maintain a focus and emphasis on this area when all companies are looking to cut back?

It has been critical to our success, but our executive leadership team understands this. Our programs directly support three priorities in corporate responsibility: ensuring that our stakeholders trust us to continue to operate our company responsibly; ensuring that health care solutions are accessible and affordable for patients; and focusing on society's needs by developing and delivering health care solutions. Perhaps health care companies understand it a bit more than other companies do, because of the nature of our work. There has never been a question about that commitment, and for the average consumer, the differentiating factor is to see that the commitment continues from the top of the company, and that will play to our advantage in the long run.

With many of the leading companies in this space, there is so much good that is done, but that message doesn't always get across. Can more be done to get the positive message out?

We're not in this to drive public perception and reputation. We fundamentally believe if we do the right thing that we, as a company, will be successful.

I know all the good we do for our patients every day, and we'd love to see that more people recognize it. But they either will or they won't; our job is to keep focusing on delivering value to patients. ●