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Female role models with positivity inspire and empower tomorrow's leaders #Women's Day 2020

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In conversation with Dr Linda Bedran, Global Lead, Corporate Affairs at Upjohn (a division of Pfizer) to applaud her inspiring journey through the healthcare industry



International Women's Day 2020 embraced the world with its new campaign **#EachForEqual**, aiming to draw attention to the difference each woman can bring out. Gender equality is essential for economies and communities to thrive. The campaign is expected to bring about change by raising awareness of bias and calling out inequality and to cheer women's achievement. Asian Women have always pioneered in the healthcare sector with venturesome women heading the most influential positions in the different domains of health and medicine. Biospectrum Asia has always been mesmerized by our courageous women leaders in the healthcare industry and is celebrating this women's day with one such spectacular and inspirational achiever **Dr Linda Bedran, Global Lead, Corporate Affairs at Upjohn, a division of Pfizer.**

Dr Linda Bedran is the Global Lead for Corporate Affairs at Upjohn - a Pfizer division. In her current role, Dr Linda develops and executes strategies to help shape the Global healthcare environment. Concurrently, she serves as the Vice President for Corporate Affairs and Communications for the Emerging markets, for Upjohn. She joined Pfizer in 2018 as Senior Director of

International Public Affairs for the Middle East and Africa at Pfizer.

Before joining Pfizer, Dr Linda was the General Manager for Eli Lilly covering the Near East Markets for five years where she managed to serve patients, grow the business, develop her team and achieve strong performance. Throughout her 25-year career, Linda held various roles of increasing responsibility in the Healthcare industry. She has a breadth of interdisciplinary expertise in general management, corporate affairs, communications, pricing, reimbursement, regulatory, product quality and market access. Dr Linda chaired the Lebanese PhRMA association and established the Levant Regulatory Working Group.

On this special occasion of Women's Day, **Dr Linda Bedran** gracefully shared her views and journey with **BioSpectrum Asia** to inspire millions of women in healthcare and Biotech Industry.

- **What is your opinion on the lower percentage of women leaders in the Life sciences industry?**

These days statistics show that women outnumber men in higher education in more than half of the countries in the emerging countries. More and more women are getting STEM degrees, and are entering the workforce at an equal rate to men. Yet, women fall behind for promotions on the management ladder, with only 1 out 4 C-Suite members and 1 out of 10 board members being women. The gender gap widens even more after women reach the VP and SVP levels.

We could debate factors that are either driven by company culture where women still face gender stereotypes, biased and rigid career paths, traditional operating models, lower pay, or driven by society and family expectations where life decisions play a role and women typically pick up more of the burden for meeting their families' growing non-work needs during this phase.

The result is one, we are losing talent, and the tremendous positive impact that these talents can bring to society, business and the economy. If women were to participate in the economy at an identical rate to men they could add as much as 28 trillion to the annual global GDP in 2025 (Mckinsey global institute). Gender diversity brings higher revenue, increased innovation, greater creativity, better collaboration and faster decision making.

- **Are the industries designating women to certain presumed gender-based positions in the companies?**

Instead of achieving women representation in traditional "support roles", organizations need to disrupt the traditional gender-biased career pathways and make deliberate changes to build an inclusive pathway for women to drive the business in technical and operational positions.

Succession planning cannot achieve diversity with an all-male bench. Leaders need to step out of their comfort zone, take chances, and equip women deliberately and boldly with what it takes to scale the corporate ladder. Recruitment strategies need to be aligned with this stance and the hiring process is approached with the objective of attracting diversity.

- **Share your experience as an achiever in the Life Science industry and how you excelled to reach your goals.**

At the start of my career, I took a long time to be comfortable enough to bring my authentic self to my work. It was difficult to acknowledge and address the self-doubt that hit me every time I was proposed a new job or additional responsibilities, and to speak up and raise my hand for promotion and demand the compensation I see appropriate compared to my peers — and let's not minimize the impact of the guilt feeling that every working mother struggles with…

Today, I know that I deserve to be here, my voice counts, my opinion matters, and I am making a difference. Yet, this is an ongoing journey of learning, listening, and overcoming bias and stereotypes.

I couldn't have done this alone, I was lucky enough to have parents who considered my education a priority, a spouse who supported my choices, and men and women leaders in organizations who believed in me mentored me and amplified my voice. I have been with Pfizer for 18 months only, and I have had amazing growth opportunities. This is a true reflection of the fairness that a real diversity and inclusion culture provide to the organization's talent. My previous companies gave me the opportunity to have a "non-linear" career path which enriched my perspectives and skills tremendously, yet every time, the decision to take the risk and embark on a new adventure was with me.

So, along with this ecosystem of enablers, the key for success is in us, women, who need to believe in our abilities to lead, drive meaningful impact, and adapt while being who we are. Our strength comes with our difference and the perspectives we bring to the organization.

- **What would be your suggestion to encourage women towards leadership roles and how a prolonged change can be achieved**?

Here are four takeaways I would like to leave behind. First, to women leaders I say, we have a responsibility to empower tomorrow's leaders and be the positive female role models who inspire other women. Second, to women aspiring to be leaders, I say, you were hired for your skills, use them, be yourself, set your bar high and go higher. Third, to all, let us ensure our conversations are equally diverse. Male allies are as critical to the conversations as females. Both women and men are keen to make a difference. To affect change, the conversations need to be united, not exclusive. Lastly, to companies, I urge you to establish positive cultural behaviours, encourage women to speak up, amplify their voice, give them credit for the ideas they share and develop, establish formal mentorship and development programs, be intentional about pushing people to get out of their comfort zone and grow, build on strengths, be accountable and transparent with your Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) goals.

We will succeed when we don't need to have D&I metrics anymore, when we celebrate leaders no matter the gender, race, ethnicity or otherwise, for the totality of who they are. Women are inspirational, disruptive, achievers and agents of change, I can't think of one organization who doesn't need these skills to thrive.

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