

Keeping Patients First

The potential acquisition of Allergan by Valeant Pharmaceuticals International has generated a great deal of business news. Big pharma has become a dominant force in ophthalmology, producing a major change in ophthalmic industry practices. Specifically, a business model based on research and innovation is giving way to a more profit-driven approach to patients' care, at least in some situations.

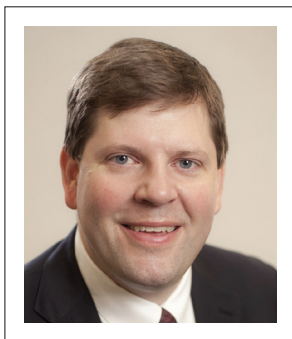
The Allergan-Valeant fight made me reflect on the former company's history. In 1948, pharmacist Gavin S. Herbert was doing well as the owner of a chain of drug stores in Los Angeles. Stanley Bly, a close friend and chemist, approached him with an idea for an antiallergy nose drop. They set up a small laboratory on the balcony of Mr. Herbert's drug-store to make the solution, which they named Allergan Nasal Drops. At the suggestion of an ophthalmologist friend, Mr. Herbert and Mr. Bly later reformulated the product as an eye drop to treat allergic conjunctivitis. The result was Allergan, the first antihistamine ophthalmic drop in the United States. The new company thrived by responding to its customers' suggestions.

The launch of Allergan effectively announced Mr. Herbert's entrance into the specialty field of ophthalmology and became his new com-

pany's moniker when he established Allergan Pharmaceuticals in 1950. By 1953, the manufacturer was producing its topical medications and formulating new products such as the first cortisone eye drop to treat allergic inflammation and the first ophthalmic steroid decongestant.

Today, the global, multispecialty health care company has leading portfolios in eye care, the neurosciences, medical dermatology, medical aesthetics, and urologics. Allergan's managers attribute its success to a focus on customers' needs, high-impact products, passionate people, collaboration, innovation, and integrity. The company's goals are achieved when (1) doctors and patients place their trust in the manufacturer and its products, (2) employees excel, and (3) corporate efforts make a meaningful difference in the lives of the patients and communities they serve.

The final chapter of the Allergan-Valeant story has yet to be written. Running businesses more efficiently is clearly beneficial and necessary in the current health care climate, but I would argue that nobody wins when financial gain is valued over the needs of patients. Whatever the outcome of the current battle, I hope that Allergan's long-standing commitment to the research and development of innovative new products is preserved, thus continuing to enhance patients' lives. ■



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