

## Science First

An Interview with Percival Barretto-Ko, Chief Business Officer, Astellas

**EDITORS' NOTE** *Percival Barretto-Ko is the Chief Business Officer of Astellas. In this role, Barretto-Ko is responsible for the execution of the company's corporate strategic plan to advance external and internal innovation and help ensure Astellas continues to serve the unmet needs of patients around the world. Previously, Barretto-Ko was the President, Astellas Pharma US, where he was responsible for the operations for Astellas Pharma across the U.S., headquartered in Northbrook, Illinois.*



Percival Barretto-Ko

**COMPANY BRIEF** *Astellas (astellas.com) is a company dedicated to improving the health of people around the world through the provision of innovative pharmaceutical products. Astellas focuses on serving patients' medical needs across multiple therapeutic areas, including cardiology, hematology, immunology, infectious diseases, oncology and urology.*

### **Will you highlight the history and heritage of Astellas and how the business has evolved?**

Astellas was founded in Tokyo in 2005 when Yamanouchi and Fujisawa merged, joining nearly two centuries of experience in producing pharmaceutical drugs. Today, Astellas employs more than 17,000 people globally and is a world leader in developing innovative medicines. From the beginning, we've continued to build on our deep-rooted heritage of openness, forward-thinking and respect for all. Our R&D organization, for example, focuses steadfastly on the patient by seeking novel innovation that serves their unmet needs. By creating solutions for some of the most challenging disease areas – including oncology, our largest disease area of focus – our “Science First” approach delivers breakthroughs to patients in need while contributing growth to our shareholders and stakeholders.

### **How do you define the Astellas culture and how critical is culture to the success of the company?**

At Astellas, our employees' unique perspectives help build our inclusive culture and are critical to delivering value to patients. We operate each day with a shared purpose of meeting the needs of patients around the world.

Our culture is part of our DNA and following the “Astellas Way” means acting with integrity and respect for all partners while maintaining a clear focus on delivering safe, effective and reliable medicines for patients.

I believe that establishing an authentic organizational culture built on shared values has never been more important which is why I am proud to see Astellas leading by example. Our long-term focus on employee diversity and cultural inclusion has taken on increased urgency with an emphasis on a top-down commitment to sustain meaningful engagement for years to come.

### **How has Astellas adapted the way it works to address the challenges caused by the global pandemic?**

The past year was a powerful catalyst for self-reflection across the pharmaceutical industry, and Astellas was no exception. We spent much time thinking about how we serve patients and protect our employees and communities – and how we might do better. As the pandemic spread, we moved swiftly with steps to prioritize product supply and continuity for patients, ensure safety in clinical trials and support affordability and access in high-need communities for the patients we serve. One of our first steps was preventing disruption in our supply chain so patients would not lose

access to critical medicines. We also initially halted clinical trial enrollments to avoid putting any patients or healthcare professionals at risk. Once it was safe to resume, we rapidly adjusted our clinical trial operations to accommodate patients who could not visit doctors' offices by implementing direct-to-patient drug shipments. This enabled trial continuity while minimizing delays in advancing portfolio milestones.

While the pandemic caused all companies to change the way they operate during the pandemic, it also challenged and motivated us to tackle issues we had been trying to solve for a long time. We plan to carry many of these positive changes with us as we enter a “post-COVID” world.

### **Will you highlight the key areas of focus for Astellas and the therapeutic areas that it addresses?**

Our current pipeline includes potential treatments in oncology, urology and nephrology, immunology and neuroscience, while also advancing new areas of discovery research in ophthalmology and muscle diseases. Oncology is the largest disease area of focus for Astellas. We pursue targeted therapies for hard-to-treat cancers where few therapies exist. We are committed to delivering value to cancer patients and their families through innovative science in areas with high unmet need. In our Medical Specialties function, we are focusing on the biology underpinning many disease areas and the multiple modalities used to treat them.

At Astellas, we focus our research and development in areas of high unmet need in underserved and serious diseases. We believe the key to successfully treating these challenging diseases lies in a deeper understanding of biology to reveal the mechanisms and drivers of disease and their potential treatment targets. This biology-led approach uncovers the secrets of why and how diseases develop which we combine with versatile treatment modalities to create pioneering strategies for disease prevention, treatment and even cure.

Within our Focus Area Approach, we have identified four current Primary Focuses for increased investment and prioritization where we have the expertise and capabilities to deliver significant, rapid and meaningful value for patients:

1. Blindness and Regeneration
2. Genetic Regulation
3. Immuno-oncology
4. Mitochondria Biology

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**Will you discuss the products that Astellas has in its portfolio and what products are in the pipeline?**

We’re focused on maximizing the value of our portfolio’s primary products, including XTANDI to treat forms of advanced prostate cancer, and Myrbetriq for addressing an overactive bladder. We are also enthusiastic about the potential value for patients of our newer products, including XOSPATA for acute myeloid leukemia, Cresemba, an important antifungal treatment addressing a high medical need, and PADCEV for locally advanced or metastatic urothelial cancer, the most common type of bladder cancer.

In terms of what’s in development, we continue advancing our focus areas outlined in our Corporate Strategic Plan, drilling down on modalities, basic science and where we feel we can generate molecules to apply to different indications. These include mitochondrial pathways, immuno-oncology, eyesight, ophthalmology and cell therapy. We need to go back to the science, find truly innovative first-in-class treatments and take it from there.

We are incredibly proud of our robust oncology pipeline. We currently deliver important treatments for solid tumors and hematologic cancers. Our pipeline features small molecules, monoclonal antibodies, and novel immuno-oncology approaches directed at some of the hardest-to-treat cancers with few medical options. As much as immuno-oncology has been exciting and successful over the past five years, there are still many unmet needs and patients who do not respond. We’re also expecting and hopeful for zolbetuximab, which we are developing for the treatment of gastric and gastroesophageal junction cancer, and other therapies.

**How critical is innovation to Astellas’ business and where is innovation taking place in the company?**

Innovation is fundamental to what we do at Astellas. It is at the core of who we are, and as a result, we are continually working to turn innovative science into value for patients. Throughout our R&D process, from bench to clinic and to our patients, our “Science First” approach optimizes our chances of creating new treatment options and maximizes value for patients with high unmet needs. This means recruiting and retaining top diverse talent to pursue the most

meaningful breakthroughs and then advancing these discoveries at the best locations.

Our work does not stop at developing medicines. In our “Rx+” business, we combine our existing expertise with technology and knowledge from different fields to expand to new products and services beyond our core prescription pharmaceutical products that will contribute positively to the patient journey. Our Rx+ programs encompass prevention, diagnosis, treatment and post-treatment care and management products and services.

Astellas is approaching innovation in a new way this year by bringing together key divisions that play a role in driving our internal and external innovation under a single umbrella. I recently assumed the role of chief business officer and will focus on advancing innovation across the organization while spearheading the execution of Astellas’ new Corporate Strategic Plan. I will be helping to drive transformation in our core business processes, including discovery, patient and customer interactions, employee engagement and business development. This includes ensuring the acquisition and integration of exciting, innovative technologies and new businesses into Astellas, with the ultimate goal of seeking ways to continually serve patients’ unmet needs.

**Will you discuss Astellas’ focus on building a diverse and inclusive workforce?**

I believe there is too much at stake today for companies not to prioritize a diverse workforce and inclusive workplace in authentic and sustainable ways. In just over two decades, people of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds are expected to be the majority in the U.S., yet hiring practices and leadership across the pharmaceutical industry still don’t reflect these numbers.

At Astellas, we’ve outlined tangible steps our leaders can take to promote diversity and inclusion, now and in the future. Key areas we’re targeting include:

- Setting D&I goals and benchmarks – holding ourselves accountable to improvements by identifying, implementing and learning from KPIs. For example, we’ve committed to sharing diverse workforce data with employees on a quarterly basis.

- Mitigating implicit bias – expanding efforts to identify and address bias in companywide systems and processes, including the way we recruit, hire and promote top talent.
- Addressing health equity – centralizing and advancing our efforts to reach diverse communities in a range of activities, from trial recruitment and patient advocacy to disease awareness and marketing operations.

**What do you see as Astellas’ responsibility to the communities it serves and how critical is community engagement for the company?**

From the COVID-19 pandemic to issues of racial unrest and social injustice, 2020 highlighted many longstanding disparities in our systems and communities across the U.S. These events have only elevated our industry’s opportunity and responsibility to positively impact the areas where we live and work. Over the past year, we’ve prioritized support focused on our local and global communities’ safety and well-being. This ranged from donations to several humanitarian organizations to aid in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of COVID-19 in affected communities and nonprofit organizations focused on racial justice and equity. The Astellas Global Health Foundation is providing \$2 million in emergency funding for projects focused on improved healthcare infrastructure, COVID-19 training and education in low-income countries.

Each year, Astellas provides up to five days of paid time off to full-time employees to volunteer for charitable organizations, in addition to their holiday and vacation time. In 2019, this resulted in approximately 27,005 total volunteer hours. Because giving back is so deeply rooted in our culture, we worked hard to keep that spirit alive in our virtual working environments throughout 2020. We found a partner who helped us create an employee volunteerism program to build caregiving kits donated to select hospitals. We also collected and donated more than 35,000 items during virtual collection drives.

More than any other year, 2020 challenged Astellas to keep patients and employees at the center of all we do and I feel confident and hopeful about what lies ahead. As monumental changes continue reshaping our culture and society, we’re committed to showing the world how we’re part of the solution. ●