

## Laverty levitates Eisai's US image

After nearly a quarter of a century in leadership communications roles at Bristol-Myers Squibb and Novartis, Robert Laverty signed on in April as VP, US corporate communications at Eisai Corporation of North America. He's excited about the opportunity to help the company increase corporate and brand awareness as it ramps up its US presence.

"Eisai is a growth company," Laverty says. "Following the acquisition of oncology company MGI Pharma, the challenge is to build a communications department that can take on all the new opportunity and potentially increased number of products. Eisai is quite well known in Japan. It's not as well known in the States—it's just starting to build identity awareness, and that's what's so exciting about being here."

Employees are clear on the company's brand and mission, Laverty says. "A vision and values survey revealed that internal recognition of the mission and strategic direction of the company is astronomical—in high 90s. The challenge is to not lose that as we grow."

Eisai's roots extend to 1941, but it didn't begin marketing products in the US until 1997 with the introduction of Alzheimer's drug Aricept (co-promoted with Pfizer). The launch of Aciphex (co-marketed with Johnson & Johnson's PriCara) followed in 1999, and Eisai grew to a \$2.6 billion enterprise in 2006.

Laverty will head brand and corporate communications and provide US IR support. He will work with leaders of Eisai business units and with corporate leaders in Tokyo, to develop and ensure communications consistency. "The idea is to maximize the brand value of Eisai products and support the pipeline," he says. "We've got a number of pipeline products, and they all need support. We need to figure out what we need from a resource standpoint to support growth and [to ensure that] business units know what communications can do and that we're setting expectations."

**"Eisai is well known in Japan. It's not as well known in the States—it's just starting to build identity awareness, and that's what's so exciting"**

### Robert Laverty

VP, US corporate communications, Eisai

#### 2003-2008

Various to VP global comms, malaria initiatives, Novartis Pharmaceuticals

#### 1985-2003

Various to senior dir., corporate policy, BMS

Growing up in Clifton, NJ, Laverty had a passion for science and helping people, and he worked at a pharmacy in high school. He later became a pharmacist (he still keeps his license active), and loved working in a hospital, going on rounds with doctors and teaching diabetes training, but he realized he could reach broader audiences through healthcare communications. In the mid-'80s he joined PR agency Burson-Marsteller, working for clients like Pfizer and Dupont. Saralie Slonsky, one of the agency's senior healthcare executives at the time, mentored Laverty and put his background to good use.

"His pharma experience was important to us," says Slonsky, currently a healthcare communications consultant. "He helped us translate dry medical information. We didn't understand it the way he did. He helped open our eyes and open doors."

Laverty says the pharma industry has "always been under the microscope," and despite negative attention, "it continues to do what it does best, which is innovate."

While at BMS, he worked on "Secure the Future," a five-year, \$100 million program targeted to women and children affected by AIDS in Africa. As VP of global media relations, malaria initiatives at Novartis, he returned to Africa help get malaria treatment Coartem to as many people as possible. "Access to essential

medicines was a wonderful area to work in, especially as a healthcare professional," he says.

"[The Africa projects] opened my eyes to challenges we face as a population and an industry to try and help people who don't have the means to pay for the medicine we're developing."

Laverty is settling in at Eisai and looking forward to helping it meet business objectives and raise its profile. "Communications is at the executive committee level, which is where I think it should be," he says. "As we're moving up in terms of growth opportunity, the challenge becomes greater in developing strategic communications to support business objectives." — Tanya Lewis



PHOTO LEFT: DAN D'ERRICO