

## Ipsen head leads continental charge

**W**hen telling an executive's professional tale, it's cliché to identify a single moment and show how it influenced everything that followed. Yet in the case of newly appointed Ipsen North America president Cynthia Schwalm, it's hard not to make an A-to-B connection between that moment—her first industry job, as an oncology and critical-care nurse—and a career in life sciences that has now spanned more than three decades.

"When I look at the business, I actually see patients in my mind," Schwalm says earnestly. "I don't see numbers. I see sites of care."

Sometime in the first half of 2015, Schwalm's professional life will come full circle when, pending an FDA thumbs-up, Ipsen launches its first oncology drug in North America. Fast-tracked for consideration, the new indication for Somatuline—to treat gastroenteropancreatic neuroendocrine tumors—ranks as a transformative opportunity for Ipsen in a market where it lacks the profile it enjoys elsewhere.

"It's a flagship brand for the company," Schwalm says, and one that poses challenges and offers huge potential returns (should Somatuline succeed to the extent Ipsen hopes it will, it will help fulfill Schwalm's goal to grow Ipsen's North American presence from 5% to 30% of the company's overall business by 2020). Schwalm, not surprisingly, is focusing on the opportunities. True to her background, she seems most wowed by the prospect of marketing a true breakthrough therapy.

**"When I look at the business, I actually see patients in my mind. I don't see numbers."**

### Cynthia Schwalm

President, Ipsen North America

2008–2010  
President, Eisai North America

2003–2008  
Vice President Oncology, Amgen

"How many times do you get to launch a very cool medicine with a great safety profile that helps patients in a way they haven't been helped before?," she asks. "We live for this."

The "we" she references is about to expand. Ipsen is currently hiring more than 100 staffers in North America and plans to add 100 more during the next year. In addition to the critical Somatuline launch, then, Schwalm will need to mind the company's cultural evolution on the continent.

Schwalm turns serious, however, when discussing how to elevate Ipsen's North American profile, especially vis-à-vis the company's established and successful operations in other locales.

"We're not the dominant culture," she explains. "My job is as the head of a subsidiary of a French company, and a big part of it will be constantly educating about the uniqueness of this market."

It's a role she has played before: "I've had the good fortune of working for wonderful non-American leaders. At Johnson & Johnson, my bosses were Belgian. I've worked for German and Swiss companies. I was the top female executive at a Japanese company."

Ipsen VP business analytics, comm strategy & operations Paul Saatsoglou, who first worked alongside Schwalm at Janssen in the 1990s, says that this innate "ability to connect" ranks among her greatest strengths as a colleague. "She inspires loyalty throughout her interactions with her team."

Perhaps it's not just Schwalm's tested leadership abilities, but her willingness to embrace leadership roles, that make her a perfect fit at Ipsen. "You can't replace good leadership. In life sciences, we've seen that play out time and time again," she says. "If you lead with technical information, it can get in your way."

Schwalm jokes about her and her husband's new status as empty nesters but, in a serious vein, also feels a true sense of mission, both for 2015 and beyond. "[The company] put boots on the ground here in North America and acquired some properties. Now it's time to drive our presence as we head into the launch. We're ready."

—Larry Dobrow



PHOTO: EDWARD CALDWELL