

Women in Science: Cathryn Clary

Our Global Head of Patient Affairs and Policy shares why it's critical to engage patients throughout the drug development process.

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Cathryn Clary, Global Head, Patient Affairs and Policy, Chief Medical Office at Novartis

We recently sat down with Cathryn Clary, who is responsible for keeping patients top of mind in her role as Global Head of Patient Affairs and Policy in the Chief Medical Office of Novartis. Clary works directly with the Global Drug Development team to help develop policies and protocols and to ensure that we're putting patients first at all times. In this latest installment of "Novartis Presents: Women in Science," she shares key insights into her day-to-day work.

Tell us more about your role and the Patient Affairs and Policy team.

I have been in my role in Patient Affairs and Policy at Novartis since 2016. Patient affairs is focused on interactions with patients, whose input and guidance are sought throughout a product's lifecycle to ensure our practices are based on their perspectives and meet patient and industry needs. That might sound like a mouthful, but to put it more succinctly, our team helps Novartis become a more patient-focused organization and ensures our policies reflect that.

What is your favorite part of your job at Novartis?

I love the diversity of activities in the role. From working with internal teams across divisions, to working with the patient advocacy organizations and patient groups externally, to speaking externally about what we are doing – every day is different and exciting.

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What is the most challenging part?

I consistently have to keep in mind my audience internally when presenting new ideas to help drive change and get people to see things differently. We all want the same thing: for patients to feel better and live longer. It's just a matter of speaking the same language as my audience, which is a very broad group!

Why is patient input in clinical trial development so critical?

Engaging patients in drug development and clinical trials is critical on several fronts. First, patient knowledge and experience with their disease are invaluable in helping us design our trials. Patients can also give us insights into meaningful outcome measures and how to decrease the burden of participation. We believe that early patient engagement has benefits such as faster, more efficient trials. Secondly, we know that the healthcare community expects it. In particular, regulatory agencies such as the European Medicines Agency (EMA) and the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) are interested in quantitative patient input in regulatory submissions. Finally, engaging patients is simply the right thing to do, and Novartis has the tools and resources to do it.

The Novartis Patient Declaration is our core tenet. How does it relate to the work that you do?

There are numerous touchpoints across our organization. For example, when we think about the pillar of “clinical trial input,” we can envision working with our clinical trials team in ways to make it easier for patients to share their knowledge and experiences, as we recognize that they often have an invaluable perspective. For another, the pillar of “data transparency and data integrity” prompts us to work with the medical team to think about how we can change the way we present updates about data or ongoing trials so they are easy to find and understand.

I am excited about what's ahead as we continue on the path of making Novartis more patient-focused. Knowing that the work I do each day is going toward making it easier and more rewarding for patients to get access to the right information, care and guidance they need motivates me each and every day.

When did you first know you wanted to work in science?

I was considered a bit of a “bookworm” during school and really began to love science, particularly biology, as early as elementary school. I eventually developed an interest in human medicine, thinking I wanted to go into medicine like my father, grandfather and great-grandfather before me!

What is your advice for young women and girls interested in science?

Girls have every bit as much ability to succeed in science as do boys, so if you love it – or are intrigued – go for it. To help you succeed, find a mentor, perhaps a teacher or an older student who loves science, and share your dreams and fears with them.

“Novartis Presents: Women in Science” is an ongoing series showcasing women at Novartis who are helping develop innovative oncology medicines for people with cancer and related diseases.

Meet Cathryn Clary, Head of Patient Affairs & Policy at Novartis and one of our “Women in Science.”
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