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Kiersten Combs
President
AstraZeneca Canada

What gives you the greatest satisfaction in your work?

I'm extremely proud to work for an organization that discovers and brings life-changing medicines to patients across Canada and around the globe. I get tremendous energy working with talented people who share this strong sense of purpose. At AstraZeneca, we're pushing the boundaries of science to develop the next generation of life-changing medicines in many disease areas—from cancer to cardiovascular disease, asthma and COVID-19.

How do you balance career and your personal life?

I imagine I juggle work and family life like many moms do—sometimes pretty well and sometimes not so much. Finding a perfect balance all the time is simply not possible, at least for me, so instead I try to live by a few key principles. First, being a present mother is most important

to me. This has meant tapping into the flexibility available through work to accommodate my home commitments—learning to ask and not feeling bad about stepping away from time to time. Second, I believe I'm a better parent for the purpose and value my career provides. On days when I'm less than 100% at home, I try to look at the long run and believe the example I'm setting as a working parent will outweigh whatever shortcomings there may be in that moment. Lastly, I talk about balance a lot in the workplace because we're all trying to find it, no matter our gender or age. I try to demonstrate my own flexibility at work in the hope that I'm an example for others to feel empowered to define the flexibility that works for them.

What advice would you give to the next generation of female leaders?

I encourage women at all stages of their career to embrace risks and push through moments of self-

doubt that can hold them back from exploring new opportunities. It's often the moments when we're most uncomfortable, when we're stretching ourselves beyond our comfort zone, that can be the most rewarding and lead to next-level growth.

It's also important to have a network of trusted colleagues and mentors who can be a sounding board and give us insights into ourselves. The reality is we're not always able to see our own strengths and potential—and sometimes simply knowing that someone is rooting for you is just the support you need to take on the next big assignment that can lead to great personal success.

What excites you about the future of medicine?

Today, groundbreaking scientific and medical advances are transforming how complex diseases are diagnosed, treated and even cured. AstraZeneca has a strong science-led culture and our research and development efforts are focused on targeting the

underlying causes of disease in ways never seen before. We're working to tackle unmet medical needs and create the next generation of therapeutics, including new drug modalities like oligonucleotides, mRNA and bicyclic peptides.

With a deep pipeline and focus on transformative science, our footprint in Canada is growing rapidly. We have the potential to launch more than 12 new medicines and indications annually for Canadian patients over the next few years and our Mississauga-based Global Clinical Hub is leading more than 100 oncology and biopharmaceutical clinical studies worldwide. There has never been a more exciting time to be at AstraZeneca.

Coming out of the pandemic, how do you see the health-care system evolving?

The pandemic has impacted our health-care system in ways that will take years, if not decades, to recover from. Wait times for surgery, gaps in cancer screening programs and a lack of human health resources are challenges that have always been there—the pandemic has only made them worse.

Finding ways to build more resilient and sustainable health systems is complex work that can't be done alone. We want to be part of the solution, which is why we recently launched the Partnership for Health System Sustainability and Resilience, a health-care collaboration involving AstraZeneca, the London School of Economics, the World Economic Forum, the University of Toronto's Institute of Health Policy, Management and Evaluation, Philips and other stakeholders. This collaboration aims to tackle key gaps in the Canadian health-care system by proposing evidence-informed solutions and policy recommendations to strengthen the system and deliver better care for all Canadians.

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Priscilla Nykoliotion

Senior Manager, Payer Engagement & Strategic Partnerships, Private Market
AstraZeneca Canada



How do you see the role of private insurance and benefits companies evolving in the future?

To discuss the future, it's hard not to talk about the present. Our health-care system is under intense pressure at the moment and it's clear that private insurance and benefits companies have a critical role alongside the public system to find efficiencies and help fill key gaps in care.

Modernizing our health-care system, including embracing digital health technologies, is a critical first step. A few examples include encouraging widespread adoption of wearable technologies to monitor health status; improving access to the latest cancer screening and genetic tests to aid early diagnosis; and ensuring equitable access to personalized medicines that allow patients to best target their disease—regardless of whether they're in the hospital or not.

How has AstraZeneca's employee benefits program evolved, particularly through the pandemic?

The pandemic posed extraordinary challenges for many families and put a spotlight on health—mental health and wellness, in particular. Throughout the pandemic, we accelerated the introduction of new programs and expanded existing offerings across our three key pillars of wellness—mental, physical and financial—to best support employees and their families.

This expansion of support included new virtual health-care options to give employees and their families access to certified medical practitioners and mental-health experts. We introduced LifeSpeak, an expansive online health and wellness platform, providing access to hundreds of videos, podcasts, as well as information on a broad range of topics, including: mental health, stress management and resilience, children's health and nutrition. We also doubled the maximum for mental-health practitioners within our benefits program. While these changes and others were triggered by the pandemic, they're valuable additions that will further support employee health and wellness in the long term.