LatAm Healthcare Pulse

Key data and perspectives on patient care

Colombia

GHI has been monitoring health care trends in Latin America throughout the COVID-19 crisis, interviewing physicians, surgeons, hospital administrative personnel and medical staff on a regular basis to understand how the pandemic, global market supply chains, and government policy are affecting patient health outcomes and healthcare market dynamics.

In this brief, we report key insights and local medical perspectives from Colombia in the second quarter of 2021, from primary research conducted with experts in cardiology, neurology, endocrinology, and other areas of general surgery. GHI's findings track fluctuations in hospital investment decisions, purchasing patterns and procedure volumes from quarter to quarter. Findings from the first quarter of 2021 are available **here**.

- Mass demonstrations in May 2021 and continued stay-at-home orders have prolonged the disruptions in the hospital market.
- COVID infections continue. The Delta variant is proving more infectious and deadly than earlier strains of the virus and a 4th wave during the third quarter is a significant concern.
- Less than a third of the population has been fully vaccinated. At the current pace of vaccination, Colombia will reach herd immunity only by 2022.
- Economic activity will continue to recover in fits and starts during the remainder of 2021, with important implications for the medical device and equipment sector.

"With the measures that the government took, nobody respected anything: people went out to the streets to protest and a new outbreak is expected"
—Physician, private practice, Colombia (May 2021)

Key data on COVID in Colombia

- COVID Deaths (official Count): >91,000
- Excess Deaths attributed to COVID*: >77,800
- Vaccine supply coverage – Population covered by supply of vaccines – 54.1%
- Vaccination rollout – population having received first vaccine shot – 40%
- Vaccination rollout** – Fully vaccinated population: 27%
- Herd immunization speed – estimated date for herd immunization: Q2 2022

Sources: AMI, Tracking LATAM's COVID recovery, 24 June 2021, Council of the Americas, Bloomberg. Statista, The Economist.

*Estimate as of July 23, 2021. While the official death counts have been reported in many outlets, a number of sources indicate that these counts vastly underrepresent the true loss of life. One of these sources is *The Economist*, which has compared actual deaths to historic averages for the same time period in prior years in order to estimate the excess amount of deaths attributed to the virus.

** Estimate as of August 13, 2021.

Key data on medical devices in Colombia

- General, non-emergency surgeries and procedure volumes are still 35-40% below their historic averages. Cardiovascular procedures and neurosurgical interventions are down by an average of 35% compared to pre-COVID levels, and by as much as 50% to 70% in some specialty areas.
- Hospitals expect a gradual return of patient and procedure volumes in line with vaccination rates. On average, surgeons expect a return to a full schedule of surgeries within 4-5 months, by the last quarter of 2021. Specialized surgeries will return sooner, within 2-3 months.
- Purchases of devices that were not essential for the treatment of respiratory diseases decreased and have yet to return to pre-Covid levels. Distributors and suppliers of cardiovascular devices and equipment report decreased sales of up to 40% year-on-year.

"For cardiovascular devices, we saw a decrease in sales during the last 6 months since hospitals gave priority to respiratory issues due to covid-19."
—Procurement Manager, Distributor, Colombia (May 2021).

"Due to the situation during the pandemic, purchases of ear plugs, ventilation tubes and microdebriders [used in ear-nose-and-throat procedures] have dropped at least 20% compared to our sales during 2019."
—Procurement Manager, Distributor, Colombia (May 2021).

- Supply chains were again disrupted by public protests in May, contributing to shortages in rural clinics and smaller provincial cities.

"If the national strike continues, it will affect three quarters of distributors and marketers in Colombia."
—Spine and skull surgeon, Mid-sized private hospital, Bogotá, Colombia (May 2021).

- Demand will return gradually and pick up in 2022 as hospitals restock depleted inventory. Demand for single-used devices and equipment will increase.

"There was no shortage of supplies, but purchases did drop. Wholesale purchases decreased due to the pandemic. There was a change in hospital purchases to products that are more urgent for the treatment of COVID-19."
—Cardiovascular surgeon, Colombia, large private hospital, Bogota (June 2021).

"The desire to have cleaner surgery areas and prevent infection will cause hospitals to seek more single-use options."
—Electrophysiologist, large private hospital, Cali (May 2021).

- Price increases will stabilize, though they are unlikely to fall back to pre-COVID levels, except in select categories where distributors and importers have overstocks of select devices.

"During the months of April and May 2020, which was when the pandemic was very strong, the costs increased in some products between 10% and 20%, but it normalized and they went down again. They did not return to the initial price, but they did adjust."
—Procurement specialist (May 2021).

- Diabetes treatments have been curtailed throughout the past year: uptake of continuous glucose monitors (CGMs) and insulin pumps has fallen by over 30% year-on-year since the first lockdown in the spring of 2020. There is a trend toward more affordable accessible products for glucose monitoring.

GHI will continue to report on noteworthy trends in-country. For more in-depth market intelligence and insights, please visit our website, **https://globalhealthintelligence.com/category/ghi-analysis/**