

## Pau Ricós, General Manager Iberia - UCB

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***UCB has a firm commitment to innovation as evidenced by the fact that it invests 28% of its turnover in R&D.***

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*UCB's general manager for Iberia, Pau Ricós, comments on the Belgian company's upcoming launches, its focus on immunology and neurology, and the importance of R&D - UCB spent around 28 percent of its revenues on R&D in 2021. In addition, Ricós analyses Spain's slow access to innovation and the pros and cons of decentralisation.*

### **When you took over the general manager role at the end of 2019, you spoke publicly about consolidating the transformation of UCB Iberia. What has happened since then?**

In 2019, UCB was coming from a time of stability, helping patients live how they wanted to live, particularly for epilepsy, neurology and immunology - inflammatory rheumatic diseases. After 2019, the company started working to launch up to six new molecules; an important responsibility that demanded transformation. The objective has forced us to reinforce some areas such as dermatology and rare diseases.

I joined UCB right after completing my pharmacy degree when I was 23 years old. I always appreciated UCB giving me an opportunity at a time when I had little experience. I will always be grateful to the company for that. My first role with the company in 1999 was as a medical rep, something I did for six years. I later became a manager and worked in market access, immunology, and other areas. The organisation has always put me in a position to succeed, with great talent to

learn from. Since 1999, the company has changed in many ways, but the essence has remained. The DNA of the company has always been about collaboration, team spirit and passion in everything we do.

**Putting UCB Iberia in a context within the global organisation, what is the importance of the region to the company?**

Iberia is today the second largest European affiliate by total revenue after Central Europe; our affiliate is special due to our ability to innovate in Spain. The key element of our strategy is to add value to patients by using all the tools, channels and scientific advances available to us to understand the different expressions of a disease and integrate the real needs of people in our research and development process of new innovative medicines.

In that regard, we work closely with patient groups and associations that offer valuable services to patient communities. Similarly, we collaborate with leading researchers to advance science and provide the solutions that patients need.

**You have also disclosed that these are exciting times for UCB Iberia as you are preparing two product launches this year and another in 2023. What can you share about them?**

Our expectation for Spain is to launch our romosozumab – indicated in the treatment of severe osteoporosis in postmenopausal women at a high risk of fracture – this year. In addition, towards the end of the year we hope to launch bimekizumab for the treatment of adults with moderate to severe plaque psoriasis. We have high expectations for the latter; it could create a before and after in psoriasis.

These will be my first experiences launching medicines as general manager of UCB Iberia. However, I have been involved in the process before, just not as the head of the organisation. It is a great responsibility, especially because UCB specialises in pharmaceuticals that address unmet medical needs.

**One of the common themes of PharmaBoardroom's interviews in Spain has been the fact that the country is lagging its European neighbors with respect to access to**

**innovation. How is UCB coping with that situation?**

It is true that Spain is having difficulties around access to innovation; the national delays in relation to EMA approvals have a long way to go, and we all have a role to play in that. The evaluation and financing process of medicines needs to be reworked, it must be a more open process that takes into account the point of view of experts and patients. As in most things, we should aspire to create more synergies because we all have common objectives.

**One counter argument to this is that maintaining such a generous social welfare state is expensive and Spain already has one of the highest life expectancy rates in the world. Is there common ground to be found, such as value-based agreements?**

These types of agreements are fundamentally important for UCB. In fact, back in the day we pioneered the design of risk sharing agreements based on clinical outcomes within rheumatology. We all must work towards fostering a sustainable system; it does not make sense to have an industry with prices it considers fair but a payer that feels it is losing something. Spain needs a collective effort, a sense of mutual responsibility.

We must find common ground because, in the end, we are all patients. Risk sharing agreements are a great tool because the system ends up paying only for those products that make a difference for patients. Companies, too, have a responsibility to invest only in products that will make a difference.

The voice of patients is an element that is often overlooked. Fortunately, at least in Spain, that has advanced a great deal, especially in rare diseases. However, patients are not as included as they should in the decision-making process.

**You mentioned immunology and neurology as the two main areas of interest for UCB. Which unmet medical needs are you addressing?**

We have made great advancements in both areas in recent years. Our upcoming immunology product, for example, has shown in clinical trials that it could be a breakthrough therapy. For psoriasis patients, considering the stigma around the disease which limits their social activity, it represents a life-changing product.

In neurology, thanks to the recent acquisition of Zogenix, we will be able to offer patients Fintepla, an oral solution developed to treat seizures associated with Dravet syndrome, a rare, lifelong form of epilepsy that begins in infancy. Studies project that there are between 600-1,000 cases in Spain. We have a responsibility to help patients and the people taking care of them.

### **What is UCB Iberia's footprint in R&D?**

Spain participates in the development of all major UCB products; we have sites conducting clinical trials in both immunology and neurology. At a global level, UCB is a clear believer in innovation, as evidenced by the fact that the company spends 28 percent of total revenues on R&D.

### **Finally, some of your colleagues in Spain have spoken for and against the decentralisation of the system. What is your view on this?**

The decentralisation of the Spanish healthcare system has its pros and cons. It is clear that every stakeholder should make a bigger effort to be more agile in order to improve access for Spanish patients. A new methodology has been implemented but the results so far do not point to improvements.

Decentralisation adds a layer of complexity but, at the same time, provides some advantages for patients. I advocate for a middle ground; it would be better to centralise some decisions.

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