Renaud Decroix – General Manager, AbbVie Belgium & Luxembourg



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After almost 20 years with AbbVie, Renaud Decroix still feels as engaged and motivated as ever by the goal of having a remarkable impact on patients' lives. Decroix highlights some of the access barriers currently standing in the way of achieving this vision in Belgium, the importance of building sustainable and long-lasting partnerships with governmental stakeholders, and his thoughts on the future of innovation in Europe.

You will be celebrating 20 years in the company next year, congratulations! How has your journey at AbbVie led you to your role today?

AbbVie is a great company. It has a very clear mission: to raise the quality of care for patients in its therapeutic areas, to have a positive impact on society that goes beyond the cutting-edge treatments we have been able to develop, and to create a unique fulfilment environment for its employees. We've just celebrated our 10th anniversary, and I have to say that our company has made a remarkable journey for the benefit of patients. AbbVie was born out of Abbott in 2013. I started at Abbott as Marketing Director for Primary Care, here in Belgium. I then moved to France and Portugal before joining our headquarters in the USA. Today, I manage the dynamic teams in Belgium and Luxembourg. These varied experiences, stimulated by our development culture at AbbVie, enable us to develop the skills and agility needed in our sector. I always advise my team

members to consider these opportunities when they arise. It’s unique!

You began your career in Belgium, then moved back many years later. How has the market evolved over this period?

As a country, we have an extraordinary healthcare community, and as soon as an innovative product is available, the scientific community is quick to adopt it. Thanks to this ecosystem, AbbVie, which is a global group, conducts around 200 clinical trials here in Belgium.

The main problems we encounter concern access: only 50 percent of innovations reach patients, and the process is generally slow. The way in which innovation is recognized and evaluated has not improved in recent years, which explains this slowness. From my point of view, this is clearly an area for improvement, and we are of course available to think about how to achieve this.

You mentioned AbbVie conducts R&D in Belgium; what makes the country a good environment in which to host clinical trials?

It is one of the best countries in Europe for clinical trials. Belgium is a country with an excellent speed of enrolment and a strong healthcare ecosystem. The level of expertise is high. We have a lot of international experts. We need to preserve this wealth and ensure that this talent remains in Belgium.

We also often forget the benefit that these trials underway here can represent for patients in search of solutions.

What is your assessment of the newly proposed medicines ‘roadmap’, which aims to address some of the current access issues?

Access is vital. Having the chance to find innovative treatments and then not making them available to patients would be a dramatic and ethically unacceptable situation. I plead for an open discussion that respects everyone’s realities. We all want the same thing: to have a positive impact on a patient’s life. Let’s find solutions together. Discussion, leaving one’s own certainties aside and finding the famous “Belgian compromise”, is the way forward.

Real World Data is increasingly important when putting together dossiers to show the true innovation of a product and the impact it has on the healthcare ecosystem, from a patient and financial perspective. How well accepted is RWD in Belgium?

I'd say there's a real desire to improve the acceptance of this data in all countries and in Belgium. AbbVie wants to excel in this area of RWD, and our teams have been heavily involved in this research for years. It's a fantastic and very concrete tool for assessing the impact of new treatments. The integration of this data must continue, as it represents added value for patients and authorities in the search for the best healthcare investments.

Globally, AbbVie's 2020 Allergan acquisition has been a key driver of growth in recent years. Is the same true in BeLux?

The acquisition of Allergan has enabled us to enter new care lines such as migraine and eye care. These are therapeutic areas where there is a lot to discover. As a company, AbbVie is always striving to be best-in-class in all the therapeutic groups in which we operate. In recent years, we have greatly diversified our range of treatments. The pipeline is strong and this is part of our strategy for the future. In Belgium, we also partner with other companies and start-ups. This was recently the case with Syndesi and iStar.

You mentioned the company has a strong pipeline. Are you able to be proactive and discuss these therapies with authorities to speed the processes up once the product is ready to be launched?

Collaboration is important, and we're always looking to establish it with the relevant stakeholders. We are currently discussing the best way to organize meetings with the authorities, as partnerships with them are essential to bringing innovation to the country on time. In some therapeutic areas, we certainly need to prepare for the future, I'm thinking, for example, of the use of combination therapies and the evolution of innovative treatment devices. We advocate and work for a more predictable system in everyone's interest, especially the patients. By working together, we can adapt to what's coming in the next few years.

What are your projections for AbbVie Belgium and Luxembourg in the upcoming years?

In immunology, our ambition is to remain a benchmark. We have launches scheduled for late 2023 and early 2024, and we see the next 12 months as the year of gastroenterology. This therapeutic area is very important in Belgium, and the country has centers of excellence and leading experts in the field.

Have biosimilars had any impact on your business?

As a company focused on developing new, innovative treatments for patients we understand that every product has a life cycle and that competition is good for driving future medical advances. Biosimilars are just another competitor entering the market. AbbVie’s business continues to evolve through a focus on our mission to bring new and better treatments to patients living with blood cancer, Parkinson’s Disease and Crohn’s Disease to name a few.

Your workplace history includes working at global HQ. When feeding back to leaders in the US about Europe, what do you tell them about the current situation?

We all want Europe, and Belgium, to remain competitive and attractive to pharmaceutical companies, not least because of the benefits this brings to patients. Current continental concerns relate to intellectual property (IP). The idea is that reducing IP periods will bring more innovation, when in fact the opposite is true. Periods of exclusivity and the stimulation of clinical research by laboratories are closely linked. Intellectual property provides reassurance in relation to the risks and costs involved in pharmaceutical R&D. If we create uncertainty and a less stable framework for recovering investments and freeing up margins for reinvestment, we risk breaking the virtuous circle of innovation in Europe.

As an AbbVie veteran, what continues to motivate you about working with the company?

First and foremost, the desire to have a remarkable impact on patients’ lives. It’s incredibly motivating. Secondly, as I was saying, this vision of corporate social responsibility makes me very proud. We invest in concrete actions for society. All over the world, for example, we have the “week of possibilities”. A week during which every employee gives up a workday, financed by the company, to go and work for the benefit of the community. This ranges from rehabilitating shelters to supporting people with disabilities. We have also developed highly innovative initiatives in

Belgium, such as healthcare heroes, which encourages students to think about tomorrow’s healthcare. Finally, there’s our culture and our willingness to help each other overcome our limits. The collective always wins out over the individual. That’s what AbbVie is all about.

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