Myriam DeLeone – General Manager, Amgen Switzerland

Despite having one of the most advanced healthcare systems in the world, Switzerland is now ranked sixth in Europe for innovative drug access and ninth for rare diseases

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Myriam DeLeone, General Manager of Amgen Switzerland, discusses the company's commitment to tackling diseases prevalent in Switzerland such cardiovascular diseases and osteoporosis, Amgen's expanding biosimilars profile, and how the company is leveraging Artificial Intelligence (AI), particularly to optimize drug development. DeLeone also comments on Switzerland's concerning deficiencies in digitalization and access, as well as its declining share of clinical trials, and shares the culture that makes Amgen Switzerland a great place to work.

Could you start by providing a brief overview of your career, including your role here at Amgen Switzerland over the past two and a half years? What leadership qualities and vision are you bringing to this role?

I have been the General Manager of Amgen Switzerland since July 2022. With a family background in medicine and a passion for healthcare, I have built a 20-year career in the pharmaceutical industry, specializing in biopharmaceutical innovation, and working with leading companies in the sector before joining Amgen. Over the past decade at Amgen, I have held various roles across different therapeutic areas and countries, encompassing both global and regional operations as well as strategic positions. This has given me a broad and diverse perspective on the business, allowing me to navigate a wide range of challenges and opportunities.

My management philosophy is centered on empowerment, trust, and flexibility, creating a culture where my team can thrive and contribute to impactful outcomes bringing our vision “to serve patients” alive. Currently, my top priority as a leader is ensuring patients benefit from innovative therapies as quickly as possible. I believe in close collaboration between all healthcare stakeholders, fostering open dialogue to keep Switzerland at the forefront of innovation. I also call for necessary reforms in framework conditions, such as pricing and reimbursement processes, to accelerate medical progress and to protect Switzerland’s leading position as worldwide innovation hub.

In addition to my role at Amgen, I am also a board member of Interpharma, where I play my part in making sure our industry is able to make a key contribution to Switzerland’s prosperity, growth and competitiveness. It is a high priority for me that all patients can benefit from innovative therapies and to further advance medical progress.

Which elements of Amgen’s product portfolio do you believe will have the most profound impact on patient outcomes in Switzerland?

Amgen harnesses the best of biology and technology to fight the world’s toughest diseases. Amgen’s medicines treat serious illnesses and typically address diseases with a limited number of treatment options. We focus on four therapeutic areas, oncology, inflammation, general medicine and rare disease, delivering innovative medicines to help people live longer, fuller and happier lives. Oncology is together with cardiovascular at the core of our business—while we have also brought rare diseases into our pipeline to tackle those unique issues.

Cardiovascular diseases are the leading cause of death in Switzerland, with 41,000 heart attacks and strokes each year. Elevated low-density lipoproteins (LDL) cholesterol is a key risk factor, and our innovative cholesterol-lowering drug effectively reduces LDL levels, potentially preventing cardiovascular events..

In osteoporosis, over 500,000 people in Switzerland are affected by the disease—primarily women. Our treatment, administered every six months, significantly reduces fracture risk, which is crucial, as untreated fractures lead to severe limitations in daily life. Despite the WHO declaring osteoporosis a public health crisis, 83 percent of Swiss patients remain untreated.

In hematology and oncology, Amgen has pioneered six cancer therapies, focusing on various malignancies. Our BiTE technology mobilizes the immune system to target cancer cells, providing

new hope for patients.

Additionally, we address rare diseases which affect fewer than 5 in 10,000 people—often with long diagnosis times and limited treatment options. In the patient journey, it often takes up to five years until a rare disease can be diagnosed. That’s a huge suffering for patients, therefore, our targeted therapies aim to meet the unique needs of these patients.

Lastly, in chronic inflammatory diseases like rheumatoid arthritis and Crohn’s disease, affecting 1.5 million Swiss patients, our medications target the root causes of inflammation, significantly improving patients’ quality of life.

What also stands out about the Amgen portfolio is our presence in biosimilars. Through these medicines we are able to contribute to the affordability of the Swiss healthcare system.

Could you elaborate on Amgen’s current biosimilar portfolio?

Since 2020, Amgen’s biosimilar portfolio has made significant strides. Our biosimilars provide high-quality alternatives to existing biologic therapies, enhancing patient access and affordability.

We are actively expanding our portfolio in Switzerland and have plans to launch several new, high-quality biosimilar alternatives in the coming years. Looking ahead, we are investigating opportunities to introduce future biosimilars targeting inflammatory diseases across different patient populations, as well in oncology and in the field of ophthalmology.

This strategic focus underscores our commitment to delivering innovative solutions that meet the evolving needs of patients in Switzerland. By offering these options, we enable healthcare systems to allocate resources more efficiently, ensuring that more patients can benefit from advanced treatments without compromising on quality. Biosimilars are valuable alternatives to high quality biologic treatments—they are very safe, effective, and have been increasingly faster-adopted over the past few years.

How would you define precision medicine in your own terms? Additionally, what specific benefits do you see precision medicine bringing to patients in Switzerland?

Precision medicine, at its core, is about leveraging breakthrough biotechnology to create life-saving treatments tailored to individual patients. It focuses on targeting specific diseases and biomarkers,

particularly for patients who often have no viable alternatives with standard therapies. Personalized treatments bring tremendous progress and hope for those who currently face limited options.

This is central to our mission at Amgen—to serve patients and address the most complex health challenges. Precision medicine can significantly improve patients' quality of life as it enables us to predict, with much greater accuracy, the success of a treatment for each individual patient. Not only does this bring hope, but it also helps reduce unnecessary side effects and treatments as patients undergo biomarker testing upfront, allowing us to determine the likelihood of their response to a treatment before they even begin.

What sets Amgen apart is the unique blend of biotechnology and technology we employ, especially as we move further into the age of artificial intelligence. New technologies have been pivotal in accelerating the progress of personalized medicine and will continue to drive breakthroughs in the coming decade. Amgen has been investing in innovation, artificial intelligence, and digitalization for over a decade, positioning us at the forefront to lead in this new era of healthcare.

How well-positioned is Switzerland to embrace the new era of precision medicine in terms of infrastructure and healthcare readiness?

Switzerland is in a leading position thanks to its strong pharmaceutical industry and innovative research environment. However, to fully take advantage of this medical progress, Switzerland needs to improve its framework conditions, such as standardizing and optimizing data infrastructure and digitalization, speeding up regulatory approvals with focus on the in vitro diagnostic regulation (IVDR), ensuring equal access to treatments, and educating healthcare professionals to accelerate adoption in clinical practice.

Precision medicine faces several challenges to be widely adopted within clinical practice. These include standardization of testing methods, data sharing, access to patient data in electronic health record systems, and the integration of multi-omics data. Therefore, a strong interoperable and nationwide, standardized, and optimized data infrastructure supported by advanced digitalization is key.

Another challenge is the low rates of biomarker testing due to slow adoption. While Switzerland matches other EU countries in companion diagnostics, it struggles to synchronize reimbursement of diagnostics with corresponding therapies. The fragmented diagnostics landscape hampers

information sharing, process standardization, and data harmonization. For precision medicine, aligning access and reimbursement of diagnostic testing with therapies is essential.

Despite these challenges, precision medicine has already demonstrated its potential to improve patient outcomes. Its promise is most evident in oncology and is rapidly expanding to other therapeutic areas like cardiology, addressing major health challenges in society.

Could you share your insights into what AI can offer and how it is currently being integrated into Amgen's operations?

We are at a pivotal moment in the biopharmaceutical industry, where we are seeing profound changes in drug discovery and development powered by the union of technology and biotechnology. At Amgen we have been preparing for this moment for over a decade—investing in the power of AI, data science, and other technologies to create the next generation of medicines that will bring the most value to patients.

Since our founding almost 45 years ago, innovation has been central to Amgen and our mission to serve patients. By further embracing that innovative mindset, we believe that Amgen can safely and ethically harness the exciting potential of emerging AI capabilities to improve patient care by reducing the time it takes to get new therapies to market—reaching more patients with existing therapeutics and better understanding our patients' evolving needs. Moreover, AI allows us to redesign ways of working to increase productivity, accelerate and inform our decision making and equip our people with future-proof skills that will help them grow both professionally and personally.

To give a few examples of our AI integrations, as an early adopter of AI tools like Microsoft Copilot, we have equipped 20,000 employees to focus on more complex tasks by reducing repetitive work. Furthermore, in the lab, AI is transforming drug research. We have established collaborations with NVIDIA, DeepMind, and AWS which have enabled us to reduce the time to clinical trials by up to 60 percent, allowing us to bring innovation faster to patients. Through these collaborations, we have trained AI models leveraging one of the world's largest human datasets, which are now installed in our supercomputing system, Freyja, at our deCODE Genetics headquarters in Reykjavik. These generative AI models enable us to analyse massive genetic datasets, predict protein structures, and optimize drug development. Simply said, it helps us to better understand human biology, identify new therapies and accelerate precision medicine.

Switzerland is known for its rigorous regulatory framework. How do you view the Swiss regulatory environment?

Switzerland's autonomous regulatory authority is a key strength for the country, providing Swiss patients with broad and rapid access to innovative medicines and treatments. However, Switzerland's pricing and reimbursement system is showing signs of strain, with increasing delays between regulatory approval and reimbursement decisions becoming a growing issue. We are actively seeking solutions to ensure timely and sustainable access to our medicines.

We engaged in a constructive dialogue with Swissmedic. We share a common goal—to ensure that Switzerland remains a hub of innovation and that Swiss patients get fast, broad access to innovative drugs. This is crucial for Switzerland to maintain its position as a first-wave market for new treatments.

As as industry our emphasis is on faster, more unified access across multiple countries to promising, innovative treatments in key areas such as cancer—especially those that meet urgent medical needs or show potential for significant improvement over existing therapies. We believe the implementation of international collaboration initiatives among authorities will further enhance access to new therapies by making the process more efficient and competitive for everyone. Some examples of existing regulatory pathways include the Access Consortium and The ORBIS Initiative—a project created by the US FDA and adopted by EMA and Swissmedic with the goal to speed up the review and approval process across multiple countries at the same time, especially for cancer treatments. Thanks to these pathways, applications have been significantly shorter than in previous years.

Despite these steps forward in approval timelines, our primary challenge still lies in the reimbursement process. For example, in oncology, the time for drug reimbursement approval can take up to 340 days. For a cancer patient waiting nearly a year after Swissmedic has approved a drug to receive reimbursement, this is an alarming delay—especially when alternative treatments may not be available.

Another troubling trend is Switzerland's position in comparison to EU countries regarding access to innovative drugs. Despite having one of the most advanced healthcare systems in the world, Switzerland is now ranked sixth in Europe for innovative drug access and ninth for rare diseases. Additionally, only 54 percent of new drugs are reimbursed compared to Germany. This trend is concerning. Instead, healthcare expenditures should be seen as a strategic investment into a

society’s future, as healthy populations live longer, are more productive, and contribute to sustainable economic growth.

As an industry, we have proposed solutions. The first is the “Reimbursed Access to Innovation” model (RIZ), which aims to provide patients with immediate access to new medicines upon approval—having a provisional price set by the Federal Office of Public Health. Any price differences would be reimbursed by the industry, ensuring immediate patient access without additional costs. We are optimistic about the potential for this model to be implemented.

The second proposal is the Modernization of the Pricing System (MOPS). Switzerland’s current pricing system is outdated and needs to account for the full benefits a treatment provides, such as reducing hospital stays, minimizing side effects, and overall improvements in patient health. These factors should be considered when determining a drug’s price. We are hopeful that the Federal Office of Public Health and policymakers will consider our proposals, as these changes are crucial for the future of healthcare in Switzerland.

Due to increased health care expenses, we are facing growing pressure on the innovative biopharmaceutical sector to reduce overall healthcare costs. The main drivers of rising healthcare costs are not new medications but an aging population, which brings an increased demand for medical treatments, and system inefficiencies.

In fact, with 12 percent of the total healthcare expenditure, the share of drug prices in the healthcare costs has remained stable for over a decade now. On the contrary, the pharmaceutical industry is the only player in the Swiss healthcare sector that makes an impactful contribution to cost containment thanks to institutionalized price reviews, resulting in savings of CHF 1.5 billion.

While we are committed to continuing to play our part—through mechanisms like the three-year price reviews and other pricing models—we cannot support policies that arbitrarily lower prices. Such measures risk undermining the availability of new, more effective treatments for Swiss patients and do not address the 88 percent of health care expenditures that continue to increase the overall health care spend due to an aging Swiss population in need of more health care and system inefficiencies.

While Switzerland retains its reputation as a European biomedical research powerhouse, countries like Belgium, the UK and Spain now hold more clinical trials every year. What can be done to bolster Switzerland’s role in global clinical research?

Switzerland’s declining share of clinical trials in Europe is a concerning trend that signals the need for strategic improvements. Fundamentally, I believe it comes down to the framework conditions that govern clinical research in the country. To provide some context, Amgen has currently about 20 active clinical trials underway across 50 investigator sites in Switzerland —underscoring our commitment to Switzerland’s role in global R&D. However, despite this, we are still seeing areas where the framework needs to evolve to keep Switzerland competitive.

In particular, Switzerland’s lack of investment in its digital infrastructure over the past decade has significantly hindered progress. Other countries have advanced much further in this space, making their trial processes faster and more efficient. For instance, if digital systems are not standardized or able to communicate across different platforms, it becomes difficult to streamline processes like patient identification and data sharing, which are crucial in modern clinical trials. This lack of digital cohesion even within Switzerland makes it even harder to collaborate on a global level. Investing in digital health technologies will be key to improving the efficiency of trials and patient recruitment. By addressing these areas, Switzerland can strengthen its leading role as a clinical research destination.

The second issue is related to regulatory frameworks. For example, the IVDR regulation has introduced longer approval times in Switzerland, sometimes causing clinical trial approvals to lag behind compared to other countries. When trials can start faster elsewhere, companies will naturally gravitate towards those markets. The slower regulatory processes in Switzerland are a real challenge, particularly in a highly dynamic and competitive environment where speed is essential for research and most important for patients in need of innovative treatments.

Finally, the high cost of conducting clinical trials in Switzerland also poses a barrier. While the country has a reputation for quality, the financial burden, combined with the delays in regulatory approvals, makes it less attractive. Equal access to treatment and companion diagnostics is another area where improvement is needed.

In a nutshell, while Switzerland maintains a strong reputation in biomedical research, challenges such as slow and complex approval processes, stringent regulations, high costs, and limited patient availability are making the country less competitive. To reverse this trend, Switzerland needs to streamline its regulatory procedures, enhance cooperation between academia, industry, and regulatory authorities, and leverage its world-class healthcare infrastructure.

Focusing on your leadership of the Swiss affiliate, how are you fostering a positive and productive workplace culture for Amgen employees, especially considering the excellent facilities and work environment?

I am very proud to say that Amgen Switzerland has been ranked as the third “Great Place to Work” (GPTW) in the country. While this external recognition means a lot to us, we will not become complacent. We continuously work on strengthening our culture and ensuring that Amgen remains a positive environment for all employees.

What makes Amgen a great place to work, in my opinion, is that we have a clear mission and vision that our employees not only understand but also believe in. Our strategic focus and priorities are well-defined, allowing everyone to know how they are contributing to the greater goal of serving patients. This sense of purpose is at the heart of what makes our workplace unique.

Furthermore, trust and empowerment are at the core of our culture. We empower our employees by giving them flexibility. We also emphasize four key leadership attributes: inspire, integrate, adapt, and accelerate. In addition, we conduct regular internal pulse surveys to gather feedback and ensure everyone has a voice in shaping decision-making. This open communication helps us make sure that employees feel heard and involved in contributing to our strategy.

Trust in our employees and a strong common mission “to serve patients” is what enables us to offer a flexible working model, allowing employees to choose when to work from home or come into the office. For strategy meetings or collaborative sessions, we encourage being present in the office to engage with colleagues, which creates high energy and fosters creativity. I believe that offering flexibility leads to getting flexibility in return, and that trust builds a stronger team.

Our culture is reflected in our employees’ satisfaction—97 percent state that Amgen Switzerland is a great place to work (external survey). Additionally, we were recently named one of the 20 most caring companies in Switzerland by GPTW. This fills me with pride because it speaks to our commitment to maintaining a strong culture and clear purpose.

Is there any final key message you would like to deliver on behalf of Amgen Switzerland?

I want to reiterate that Switzerland is a world class location for science and technology. It is a hub of innovation with a well-positioned healthcare system, and always plays an important role in the global biomedical space. That said, we have to be careful that we do not fall into complacency. I

believe we have all the ingredients, including an incredibly talented workforce, to stand out in the areas of innovation, research, and technology however we need to make sure that we have the right framework conditions in place.

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