

Michele Ravara - General Manager, AbbVie Switzerland



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Michele Ravara brings a global perspective and deep strategic experience to his role as general manager of AbbVie Switzerland, following nearly a decade leading the Oncology Business from a global standpoint in the US. In just over two months, he has embraced Switzerland's complex healthcare ecosystem and diverse talent landscape, viewing the affiliate as both a strategic growth driver and a vibrant hub for innovation. Michele's focus is clear: ensuring Switzerland remains a beacon for sustainable innovation by shaping the Swiss health ecosystem through deep collaboration with all the key stakeholders, driving value-based healthcare, and empowering teams to lead across an increasingly diverse and complex portfolio.

How did the move from the US to Switzerland to take on the role of General Manager AbbVie for Switzerland come about?

The opportunity came about quite suddenly, one could say, but it aligned perfectly with both professional and personal priorities I had been nurturing for some time. After spending nine years in the United States in corporate roles across major pharmaceutical companies, including AbbVie, I had the privilege of working on strategy, development, marketing, and the global commercialisation of breakthrough oncology therapies. However, as someone originally from Italy, there was a growing personal need to return to Europe for family reasons.

That return, however, came with two very clear conditions. First, I wanted to remain with AbbVie as it is without a doubt, it is the place I want to be. Second, I was eager to return to a role with full ownership of a sizeable P&L, similar to my earlier career before taking on global responsibilities. When the opportunity in Switzerland arose, it felt like a natural and seamless fit. Switzerland is not only one of AbbVie's largest and most strategic markets globally, but it also presents a complex ecosystem, with a fully independent Regulatory Agency, Swissmedic, and 26 Cantonal systems in one, so to speak. That level of complexity allows me to draw on the full breadth and depth of my experience, and to make a meaningful contribution to shaping the affiliate's present and future.

Two months into the role, what are your impressions thus far of both Switzerland and AbbVie's local affiliate?

It has been officially just sixty days, although it feels much longer in the best possible way. Coming from Italy, I was already somewhat familiar with Switzerland but experiencing it first-hand in this role has only deepened my appreciation. What strikes me most is the calibre of the people here. The Swiss team at AbbVie has a well-earned reputation for professionalism and impact, and I can absolutely confirm that. The team is highly educated, and Switzerland serves as a genuine international hub for talent. That was another major driver behind my decision to take this role.

In addition, the broader healthcare system is innovation-driven, which creates fertile ground for meaningful work. Of course, like many systems, it is beginning to face certain challenges. Still, overall, Switzerland remains a clear choice for anyone wanting to make a tangible impact in a sophisticated and forward-thinking environment.

And, of course, beyond the professional aspects, it is a beautiful place to live.

Can you give us a snapshot of AbbVie's current presence and operations in Switzerland?

Switzerland is a key market for AbbVie and, accordingly, our presence here is quite substantial. We currently have approx. 300 employees across three main locations. Our primary office is here in Cham (ZG), where we house both AbbVie Therapeutics and the Allergan Aesthetics teams. In Zug, not far from here, we maintain an office that includes legacy staff from ImmunoGen: the biotech company we acquired last year to enter the solid tumour space, particularly ovarian cancer. These colleagues are now fully integrated into the AbbVie family.

Additionally, we have a global R&D centre in Schaffhausen, which oversees clinical trials globally, including a significant number here in Switzerland. So, it is both a sizable and strategically important organisation, with a wide scope of responsibilities.

But beyond the numbers, there is also a strong qualitative dimension. Our workforce represents nearly 30 nationalities, with 60 percent of our team being women, something we are very proud of. This reflects the highly international and inclusive environment that characterises both our business and the country itself.

Culturally, this affiliate truly embodies AbbVie's values. Coming from the global headquarters, I can say that the culture here mirrors clearly the outstanding culture that has been a pillar of AbbVie's success. It is no coincidence that the Swiss affiliate has been recognised as a "Great Place to Work" for 11 consecutive years. We await the results of the latest survey this May, but I am confident that we will once again earn that distinction. In both quantitative and qualitative terms, this is truly a flagship affiliate within AbbVie's global network.

Can you tell us more about the role of the Schaffhausen R&D centre within AbbVie?

What's its main focus?

The main focus of the Schaffhausen R&D centre is oncology, which is one of our key therapeutic areas, particularly in terms of clinical development. The team there is responsible for coordinating oncology clinical trials across the globe. It is a global function, but naturally, Switzerland plays an important role within that scope.

Whenever possible, we aim to leverage this local asset to strengthen our engagement with Swiss key opinion leaders and the broader healthcare ecosystem. It provides a valuable opportunity to deepen collaboration and maximise the impact of our research efforts, both globally and locally.

How is AbbVie Switzerland navigating recent global changes, like leadership transition and loss of exclusivity, and where do you see the main growth opportunities now?

First of all, that chapter is behind us. A massive loss of exclusivity is behind us, and I am proud to say that AbbVie made history by being the only company in the industry able to digest the US loss of exclusivity of such a major product in just one year and return to growth. Many companies have never recovered from similar challenges.

In fact, this year, AbbVie is even projected to achieve its highest revenue ever. This speaks volumes about the strength and resilience of our portfolio strategy and our flawless execution.

From a portfolio perspective, we are now much broader and more diversified, with core therapeutic areas including immunology, oncology, neuroscience and eye care. Additionally, we have recently entered the obesity space. Across all of these areas, our focus remains the same: delivering either first-in-class or best-in-class therapies.

Here in Switzerland, this approach is particularly evident. Take immunology, where we remain the market leader. We now offer second-generation therapies that enable a deep level of disease control—whether that is deep remission in rheumatology, clear skin in dermatology or mucosal healing in inflammatory bowel disease. These treatments not only improve symptoms but also target the underlying inflammation, leading to an improved quality of life for patients and helping to slow disease progression—an important benefit for the entire healthcare system. ¹

The same philosophy applies to oncology. In chronic lymphocytic leukaemia, for example, we have a treatment that achieves such deep remission that patients can stop therapy after a set number of cycles and remain in remission. ¹

In short, our portfolio today is broader, more innovative, and fully aligned with our goal to elevate care, regardless of the therapeutic area.

It is quite remarkable for a relatively small country like Switzerland to host a global R&D hub for AbbVie. What does that footprint represent, and how do you collaborate locally to drive innovation?

When I speak about ecosystem leadership, a key component of that is working closely with stakeholders to shape the ecosystem. This includes developing clinical trials and clinical-medical platforms that ultimately help elevate care.

We are very proud of the strong collaboration we have with the scientific community here in Switzerland. From a clinical trial perspective, our footprint is truly national: we are active in all three language regions: the French-speaking west, the German-speaking centre and the Italian-speaking Ticino. That full geographical reach is something we value deeply.

In addition, we are conducting paediatric clinical trials here, which is very much in line with our mission to elevate care for all patients, especially the most vulnerable. At the heart of all this is our

close partnership with key experts across the country, which continues to be a cornerstone of how we operate and innovate.

Having worked in various markets, do you feel that being based in Switzerland provides a distinct advantage?

Switzerland is indeed a hub of innovation, and that makes it a prime location for us when innovation is at the core of what we do. The presence of numerous universities and research institutes here creates a thriving environment for scientific progress.

However, there are also areas of opportunity. The system here is structurally fragmented, which can present challenges when aiming to elevate care. In a globalized world, it's crucial to build a critical mass of stakeholders to ensure that the impact we make is truly remarkable. While Switzerland offers incredible innovation, there's always the opportunity to strengthen collaboration and unity across initiatives, ensuring that value is not diluted by fragmentation.

As a non-Swiss Executive with significant exposure to international markets, what are your impressions of the current healthcare system in Switzerland?

Coming into the system with a fresh perspective, I have the advantage of viewing it through both a local and global lens. My corporate experience has exposed me to healthcare systems worldwide, which provides a broader context. The Swiss healthcare system has been at the cutting edge, but I am beginning to see signs of deterioration, which is concerning.

Switzerland has traditionally been one of the best healthcare systems globally. For innovation and for sustainability. Innovation measures how well a system can attract, generate, and most importantly, deliver cutting-edge treatments to patients. Sustainability looks at whether the system can deliver value consistently over time. Up until now, Switzerland has excelled in both areas.

And in fact, Switzerland's life expectancy is among the highest in the world, in part due to the country's commitment to rewarding and acknowledging the value of innovative medicines. The pharmaceutical sector historically accounts for about 12 percent of overall healthcare expenditure, and this proportion has remained very stable, despite the exponential growth in the number of new treatments entering the market. So, it's crystal clear how the Swiss healthcare system has, so far, ensured innovation for patients in a sustainable way.

However, for quite some time now we're observing a shift toward a strict cost containment approach for innovative medicines, and this trend is beginning to undermine the value and long-term sustainability of the system. While fiscal responsibility is essential for maintaining a sustainable healthcare system, it's crucial that it doesn't come at the expense of innovation of patient care. Last year, the pharmaceutical market grew by 3,5 percent, but most of this growth came from generics and biosimilars, with innovative medicines lagging behind. This shift raises the question: is focusing solely on the cost of medicines the right approach for ensuring continued innovation?

The issue lies in how the value of innovation is perceived. The current dialogue focuses predominantly on the price of medicines, but this fails to take into account the broader societal impact such as improved patient quality of life, reduced hospitalisation, and overall value to the healthcare system. Medicines should not just be seen as a cost, but as drivers of higher standards of care, innovation and societal value

We are concerned because we are seeing a shift toward a narrower view of medicines, focusing solely on cost rather than holistic value. This approach risks undermining the very system that has made Switzerland such a successful healthcare hub.

Why do you think Switzerland, seems to be lagging behind other European countries in adopting health technology assessments (HTA) and other value-based approaches?

I believe the industry, including us at AbbVie, shares some responsibility here. We need to do a better job of explaining what innovation truly means in pharma and the broader impact it has. The definition of innovation is not always straightforward and tends to be too narrow, even for those in the industry, such as regulators and policymakers. There seems to be a lack of understanding of the full value of a medicine—the positive impact it can have beyond just raw efficacy as measured by technical endpoints of clinical trials, which is what health authorities tend to focus on.

This is an area where we, as an industry, need to engage more effectively with stakeholders to convey the broader picture. It's not always an easy conversation, as it requires shifting perspectives, but we are committed to playing a more active role in explaining the real value of innovation.

Historically, Switzerland's healthcare system has been successful precisely because it has recognised and rewarded innovation in a more holistic way. We want to ensure that this doesn't

deteriorate over time. We've seen other countries, initially known for high-quality healthcare systems, adopt a narrower view of medicines as a mere cost. This shift has caused the overall value of their healthcare systems to decrease rapidly, and once that happens, it's difficult to recover. We don't want Switzerland to head in that direction.

With your vast experience across different markets and healthcare systems, is there anything you've observed that could help bring Switzerland on the right path, especially in terms of pricing and value assessment?

From my experience in different markets, there are a few elements that could help make the Swiss healthcare system even more balanced, especially in terms of pricing and value assessment of innovative medicines.

One of the key points is Switzerland's use of reference pricing, where the price of medicines is compared to the prices in other countries. However, the challenge here is that Switzerland has a very different economic context compared to many reference countries. With its low taxes, high salaries, and greater purchasing power, comparing Swiss prices directly to those in countries with significantly lower salaries and taxation doesn't always provide a fair comparison.

Some countries have already started factoring in purchasing power when using reference pricing, and this could be something Switzerland could consider more systematically. By adjusting for purchasing power, we could ensure that the pricing system is more balanced and reflective of Switzerland's unique economic standing.

The second aspect is the benchmarking of the current standard of care. In Switzerland, the Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) sometimes uses outdated comparators, like 1970s chemotherapy treatments in oncology, as benchmarks. These older treatments may not accurately reflect the current standard of care. From a clinical perspective, this doesn't make sense, as it can undervalue the true benefit of newer, more effective treatments.

What we've seen in other healthcare systems is a more accurate comparison to the real, up-to-date standard of care within that therapeutic area. If Switzerland were to align its pricing assessments with modern, clinically relevant comparators, it would result in a fairer and more accurate valuation of innovative medicines.

The third point I want to emphasize is the value of medicines beyond just their raw efficacy. HTA systems, when used effectively, take into account the broader impact of a medicine such as

improved quality of life for patients, decreased hospitalizations, or reduced strain on caregivers.

Innovation today is not just about raw efficacy but also about ensuring that patients live better lives. For example, in oncology, we now have treatments that enable patients to live longer with a better quality of life. And sometimes even stopping treatment.

When pricing a drug, especially one that offers these broader benefits, it's crucial to consider its full impact on society. The value should be measured not just by how effective it is in a controlled clinical trial but also by its real-world impact on patients, caregivers, and society at large.

This is an area where Switzerland could do more. While the current system focuses on price and raw efficacy, incorporating these broader societal benefits into the HTA process would provide a more holistic view of a medicine's value.

AbbVie Switzerland has around 300 employees, and you described it as a hub for talent. What does that mean in practice, and how are you making sure it stays that way?

Our main differentiator is, without a doubt, our culture. It might sound like a well-worn phrase as many companies claim to have a strong culture, but I can say with absolute confidence that at AbbVie, whether you are at the global headquarters or in an affiliate like Switzerland, you can truly live and breathe the culture. It is consistent, tangible, and makes a real difference.

To put it simply: at AbbVie, you can be yourself. Regardless of your position, role, or background, you come into the office knowing that your voice matters and your individuality is respected. This environment of openness, trust, and authenticity naturally engages people. It encourages them to speak up, to contribute meaningfully, and to bring their full selves to work. And that is powerful.

Coming from global roles, I have seen how difficult it can be to maintain cultural consistency across such a large organisation but AbbVie manages to do it. That is why we are so focused on nurturing this culture every day. If we continue to do so, I am confident that we will not only continue to attract the right talent but also retain it. And retention is critical. It is not enough to hire great people—you want them to stay, to grow, and to build their careers with you.

As a global company, we also offer our people opportunities to move across functions, countries, and roles. Someone might start in Switzerland, move into a global role, and then return with an entirely new perspective and expanded skill set. This kind of mobility accelerates careers and makes AbbVie an exciting place to be.

But again, culture remains at the heart of it all. It is the reason I said earlier that AbbVie is “the place to be.” For anyone who wants to be part of a company where who you are truly matters. Where your ideas and your passion are valued, regardless of where you come from, and where everything we do ultimately serves our North Star: improving patients’ lives, not leaving any eligible patient behind.

Looking ahead, what are the big strategic priorities for you in your new role at AbbVie?

The key strategic priority for me is truly playing our role as ecosystem leaders. We want to make sure that we bring all of our expertise, investments, and passion to the table to ensure that Switzerland remains at the cutting edge of healthcare. Given the changing dynamics of the external environment, it’s no longer a given that this will happen. So, our priority is to actively contribute to the sustainability of innovation in Switzerland over time, ensuring that we not only lead the way but also work in collaboration with stakeholders in the healthcare ecosystem to advance care.

How do you approach leadership? What’s your personal touch with your team?

I have two core values that guide me both as a leader and as a person: humility and integrity.

Humility, for me, means recognising that there is always someone who knows more than you do, and that listening is essential. As a leader, I see my role as acting as a catalyst—creating the space for others to contribute and thrive. It is about valuing diverse perspectives and working together towards a shared vision. Integrity, on the other hand, is about doing the right thing, even when no one is watching. It is about making decisions that are firmly rooted in the values that guide our organisation. In every situation, I strive to ensure that our actions reflect our true purpose and principles, especially when navigating complex challenges. These two values are fundamental to how I lead and interact with the team. Also in my new role, I will ensure that these values drive both strategic decisions and day-to-day actions, especially when working with teams to address the challenges facing the Swiss healthcare system.

Ref 1: www.abbvie.ch

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