

Interview with Fabrice Claisse, , Novo Nordisk - Belgium



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Looking into your background, we see that you have developed your career in the local industry's top 3 players: Pfizer, AstraZeneca and Novartis until assuming your position as General Manager of Novo Nordisk BeLux less than a year ago. What motivated you to join the company back in 2010 and what attracts you most about it?

In all honesty, I was not very familiar with Novo Nordisk a few years ago since the majority of my background was focused in the area of cardiology and CNS diseases. However, I was also in contact with a large number of diabetic patients, since as you know majority of them will suffer from cardiovascular diseases. Hence, given the interconnectedness of these two disease areas and wide spread prevalence of diabetes, I was very interested to join a company that is so focused on the treatment of diabetes.

Not only do I view Novo Nordisk as a company that is really dedicated to providing treatment and devices, but it has also set itself a final objective and mission of curing diabetes. Certainly, this is a great vision to have which contrasts with that of some other companies. Novo Nordisk is a company that is genuinely and highly focused on customer centricity and you cannot imagine the contact we have with healthcare professionals, patient associations and all other stakeholders.

Mr Sergey Smirnov of Novo Nordisk Russia pointed out that one of the most important activities of Novo Nordisk today is the investment in emerging countries where the incidence of diabetes is rapidly increasing, such as in Brazil and China. Indeed, Novo Nordisk's biggest insulin production facility outside of Denmark is in Montes Claros – Brazil. Given these priorities, how has Novo Nordisk approached the European market in

recent years, and to what extent is the region a priority for the company today?

As a Danish based company, Novo Nordisk has been present in the European market for almost 90 years now since 1923. Obviously, I can understand my colleague in Russia and the investments that Novo Nordisk is making there and in other emerging countries since diabetes is a worldwide problem. However, I must point out that despite Europe representing a range of so-called developed countries, the challenges related to diabetes here are absolutely identical to those elsewhere. Granted, patients in Europe perhaps have more treatments available but that does not mean that patients are appropriately treated in Belgium or Europe. Hence, we still have a long road ahead of us.

More specifically, what is the strategic importance today of Belgium to Novo Nordisk and what is its contribution to the company's revenue?

Given the small size of the country, Novo Nordisk's Belgian affiliate represents a relatively small proportion of the group's revenues with a few percent of the total turnover. Nevertheless, all countries are important to our regional operations. Moreover, Belgium is proportional an important country in the region in terms of clinical trials. Although we do not have a specific unit here dealing with clinical trials, we do conduct a truly vast number of trials here in Belgium. In addition to this, Belgium's significance to the group is further enhanced once you consider the excellent relationships we maintain with research universities. In the context of clinical operations, Belgium represents an integral part of the group at the European level.

Novo Nordisk is a highly specialised company with a strong focus on the diabetes therapeutic area as well as growth and replacement hormones. How tailored is Novo Nordisk's portfolio to the Belgian market's needs, and what have been the best performing products here?

In Belgium, we offer Novo Nordisk's full product portfolio. For instance, we have a very good presence within haemophilia care with Novoseven®, which is a unique and lifesaving product. We also offer products for growth hormone therapy, such as Norditropin® performing good as well. Nevertheless, despite the successes and impacts these products achieve, 80% of Novo Nordisk's focus remains in Diabetes care.

Mr Carlo Ciapparelli of IMS Health in Belgium noted that the most difficult period of the so called 'patent cliff' was over with the patent expiry of Lipitor last year. In that context, how promising does the Novo Nordisk pipeline look like and what products are you most excited about in relation to your three main product areas?

Two years ago, we launched a truly breakthrough therapy, Victoza® which is an injectable prescription medicine that improves blood sugar (glucose) in adults with type 2 diabetes. As you

may know an overweight diabetic faces severe risks and Victoza® allows us to control not only the glycaemic aspects of the disease but also the patients' weight, which is a significant and pioneering feat.

In terms of upcoming pipeline, we expect to launch a new basal insulin in the near future.

Mr Erik Lommerde, your Dutch counterpart noted that the only right way forward for those wanting to be involved in diabetes care is by becoming a complete stakeholder in the treatment process by educating the patient. How have you adapted your organizational setup to achieve this level of involvement?

I fully agree with this statement indeed because we are in a very specific therapeutic area prompting us to take into account the needs of patients to a greater extent. Therefore, not only do we have to take into account the efficacy of our therapy in the treatment of glycaemia but also all other aspects of the patients. That is, given the frequency of times the treatment needs to be administered, we must consider the comfort of the patients not only because of its importance to the patient but also because it is critical to make the treatment possible. This explains why Novo Nordisk has been investing for years to develop insulin's that are more flexible in terms of treatment where patients can for instance administer their insulin treatment at the instant a meal is served rather than having to time it an hour before.

Taking such measures is very important for patients and these are based on the knowledge we have accumulated through the contacts we maintain with patients. In Belgium, given the particularities of this chronic disease, we have a number of stakeholders with who we are in close contact with on a continuous basis. This is critical for us because it allows us to understand what it is they want or need in a treatment so that we can better provide for them by investing in the right way.

What are the latest successes you have witnessed from Novo Nordisk's social outreach programs specific to Belgium in which you educate patients and the public about the disease?

We strongly believe that the medical education of both patients and physicians is critical for success. Diabetes care involves a range of activities including screening, treating and adapting to patient's needs in addition to educating them as well. This also applies to a certain level to general practitioners too since they are among the first to be confronted with various diabetes patients on an increasing level. For this reason, I think that we have to invest in medical education to ensure that the disease can be detected, treated and followed up accordingly.

Locally, we do invest heavily in medical education programs directed at healthcare professionals and patients. These programs provide healthcare professionals and patients with tools that for

instance help them manage their glycaemia levels, provide advice on their dietary intakes and help them truly understand what diabetes is. On the other hand, we are also targeting the physicians and pharmacists who are at the front lines with the patient. The objective here is to increase their awareness of the best possible treatments available today.

With respect to partnerships, Novo Nordisk maintains long-standing professional relationships with researchers, key opinion leaders and decision-makers in its main disease areas around the world, working closely with them to develop, execute and communicate the clinical development of our products. To what extent does this appetite for collaborations, partnerships and investments with companies or academia apply to the Belgian context?

Collaborations with healthcare professionals and other stakeholders are very well established in Belgium. Not only is this because of the extensive clinical trials we have here or the various investments we have made with locally, but also because of the quality and outcomes of the relationships we maintain. On the other hand, another important stakeholder to work closely with is of course the local authorities. There is still room for improvement in this area since we are still far from a productive partnership. Therefore, in an effort to improve the situation, we have taken some initiatives over the past years to start with a private public partnership which has been gaining traction. Although I speak for Novo Nordisk, I am confident that my colleagues in other companies share my feeling that we, the pharmaceutical industry, are absolutely not the enemies of the authorities. On the contrary, we have so many common objectives that we share and I think it is unfortunate that we don't take advantage of these common goals. Obviously, we would like to market the best and latest drugs, taking into account the fact that we are a socially responsible company, operating in a world of finite resources. Therefore, I strongly believe that we must work together to reach a sort of win-win situation for all.

Given the range of qualities that make Belgium an attractive destination for pharmaceutical companies, do you see room for further investment or expansion in the case of Novo Nordisk?

Given the European economic situation, it is rather difficult to say, since we are lacking the impressive growth figures of emerging nations. Nonetheless, despite current reforms and other challenges we face, there is a future for Novo Nordisk in Belgium.

Where would you like to take the operations Novo Nordisk Belgium over the next 1 to 2 years?

To be frank, I would feel rather accomplished once I am able to successfully form a public private partnership. I would like to convey to and convince the authorities of the mutually beneficial positions that we, the industry, could foster with them through such a partnership.

In addition to this, I think that as a result of the current budgetary restraints and increasing demand for the curing of chronic diseases, the overall treatment paradigm and reimbursement process will also require a change to some extent. I believe that by working in close collaboration with the authorities, healthcare professionals and stakeholders, we will be able to provide patients with the latest and most effective medicines.

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