Interview with Michaela Hrdličková, , Biogen Idec Czech Republic

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Ms. Hrdli?ková, can you please begin by introducing yourself to our readers, and providing a brief overview of your pharmaceutical career?

My educational background is in general and molecular biology, with a specialization in microbiology. I worked for approximately three years doing clinical work in this field at a hospital, and subsequently spent a year in a genetic laboratory.

I received an offer to work in the pharmaceutical industry from Wyeth. In this role, I had a greater level of interaction with people, and yet still utilized my education and was able to help those who are sick. I saw that work for the pharmaceutical industry was exactly what I was looking for.

At the beginning of my career I started as a medical representative, and then I moved on to product manager and business unit manager. I was with the company for 17 years. I learned so much during this time, constantly changing and adapting our strategies to the new realities of the market. Since joining Biogen Idec in May 2010, I continue to learn so much!

By my opinion, Biogen Idec is a truly great place to work and learn, because of its people, products, strong culture, knowledge and focus.

My way of working has always been to focus on educating versus simply selling a drug. It has been mine and my team’s job to know a medical area where we are working and to bring our customers all the important information they need for treating their patients. For example, I remember a nosocomial infections prevention program while I was at Wyeth which was created by my team and

how it was welcomed by hospital doctors, our primary customers.

From the beginning of my work in the industry the main challenges have been the financial limits of the Czech healthcare system, especially for specialized drugs like biologics. There is pricing pressure on drugs, especially in areas of specialized treatment like oncology, multiple sclerosis, rheumatoid arthritis, and psoriasis, where treatment only happens in specialized centers. Not all eligible patients have an access to biologic treatment which could dramatically improve their quality of life. Most of my career has focused on market access activities and health economic data calculations to demonstrate the value of biologic treatments for patients and society.

One of the problems with demonstrating such added value, according to certain forward-thinking industry stakeholders, is that the pharmaceutical industry is too commodity-focused, and too much focused on selling their products—rather than offering a health solution.

The pharmaceutical field is extremely complex; we have to understand the business, regulatory environment, scientific advances, reimbursement issues, and we have to bring scientific information to our customers. This is especially true with specialized treatments. In an innovative sector, and especially in the biological segment, competition should not be based only on price.

As the representative of Biogen Idec (Czech Republic), I am a Board member of the local Association of innovative pharmaceutical industry (AIFP). With the appointment of our new director, Jakub Dvoracek, I believe that we are heading in a strong new direction. There are many opportunities to communicate the added value that this industry can bring to society. We are changing individual lives, helping families, saving money in the social system, and we are investing in education and new drug development. My goal as a Board member of the association is to help improve the image of the industry in our country.

One of main goals declared by the Czech government is to save financial budget in the social sphere. The announcement of this was a sign for me: innovative drugs can save money in areas such as disability payments since many patients who have access to the proper therapies can stay active longer – going to work, staying in school, etc. The Innovative platform of AIFP initiated an analysis of the volume of chronic-illness-related disability pensions. The volume of disability pensions was growing over the last few years, and the analysis showed that these payments could be reduced by the use of innovative drugs for many patients. This argument was supported by calculating strong health economic data.

At Biogen Idec, we believe every patient should have access to the treatments they need. Multiple Sclerosis, rheumatology patients, and some other chronic patients are facing very similar problems, e.g. low access to the treatment by biologics. There are approximately 9,000 patients with MS in the Czech Republic who are eligible to receive biologic therapy —however, a little more than half of those patients are receiving the treatment they need due to financial limits of sick funds.

To help patient organizations be more informed, responsible, independent and understanding of their options, in conjunction with the AIFP and with support from the U.S. PhRMA, patient organizations in the Czech Republic will be invited to receive education specifically in the area of fundraising—independent of the pharmaceutical industry. We are trying to empower patients to be responsible for the management of their disease including the treatment access. The question is not only about patient rights, but also about compliance and responsibility. This is especially true in therapeutic areas where there are not enough funds to cover all patients.

The traditional sales model in the industry is gone. Today, there are more stakeholders involved in treatment decisions, and we as an industry must accept that payers are more and more the key decision-makers.

Given your strong efforts in approaching both payers and patients, what is the state of Biogen Idec's Czech business today?

We are performing very well! Biogen Idec truly has great products, and we are constantly bringing innovative ideas into the marketplace to ensure our patients get the best treatment we can possibly offer.

We certainly face challenges in the market, but we tackle these challenges with focused strategies. Firstly, in market access, our task is to show payers that investment in MS patients is will not lead to lost money for the system. It is clear such investment can save both direct and indirect costs of treatment.

Secondly, our strategy is to differentiate ourselves: to differentiate our company, our products, and our customers. We are a very specialized organization, and this is reflected in everything we do. We are a market leader in MS market in the Czech Republic.

Our people are very proud to work for Biogen Idec. They are highly motivated, and I believe that we have an outstanding team. For me, several elements are important in terms of staff: experience, motivation, knowledge, team work. This is fully in line with a global Biogen Idec culture.

When you work for a small company, there are positives and negatives. One positive aspect is that, globally, we are all in very close contact with each other. We are able to act immediately should any difficulties arise. In larger companies, we have a great level of communication.

Do you believe that your innovative educational and organizational efforts toward local stakeholders can serve as a working model for other Biogen Idec affiliates?

I am sure they can! We are indeed executing a number of innovative strategies, and I am very proud of our work in the Czech Republic. I already see some ripple effects throughout the broader organization. I love to find new ways of operating our business—it is my passion.

Being innovative in our business model is also a great way to attract the best talent to the company. I love to find people challenging traditional models. I love when my staff challenges our established thinking, and brings new ideas to the table. Together, we can build these ideas to fruition. Outside of the company, I am also very proud of what AIFP is currently doing. I believed that the AIFP should do more to improve our position as an industry.

The purpose of the Innovation Working Group, one of AIFP working groups —of which I am the chair person—is, over the long term, to change the mode of thinking about innovation in healthcare in this country.

We cannot just use words; we have to continue to show our value. For instance, we know the government is looking to support local knowledge-based industries, including Czech biotechnology. From my experience, the country has many great scientists, and also a strong infrastructure—especially in terms of the new research institutes These scientists are more than capable of generating innovation, but some of them lack experience in commercializing their ideas and bringing products to patients.

Companies could offer to share with the Czech researchers our knowledge and experience. Conversely, we as an industry could potentially find great new products from Czech ideas.

If, through constant innovation, Biogen Idec can change patients' lives through access to better therapies and if we can help change the environment, then my work is done.

Some analysts have pointed out that, with its vigorous focus on Wall Street, some 'Big Biotech' companies are starting to resemble 'Big Pharma.' Is Biogen Idec subject to this cultural plunge?

Biogen Idec is a very special company. Our credo is "Care Deeply. Work Fearlessly. Change Lives." You see how this credo motivates and inspires employees across the globe and here in the Czech Republic.

Our growth has been unbelievable. It is remarkable to see just how much this company has evolved in the two and a half years since I joined. By my opinion, Biogen Idec is very attractive for talented people in the industry. These people are typically very experienced, and I find that my colleagues are extremely skilled, knowledgeable, and great people. I see this throughout the entire organization.

What do you envision for the next five years of Biogen Idec's Czech business? What are your focus areas and how you achieve growth in this challenging environment?

We have to accept and understand that our environment is dramatically changing – a negative economic situation in the healthcare system, price/reimbursement regulations, HTA implementation, stronger payer positions, stronger competition, the growth of generics, and the

potential entry of biosimilars. We should be more specialized and to get new knowledge and skills to be able to discuss with multiple stakeholders. But I like it. This is great to find new ways, to solve challenging situations and primarily, to bring new treatments to patients and to change their lives and families.

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