Interview with Di Ford, Executive Director, Generic Medicines Industry Association

27.02.2012

Tags: Generic Medicines Industry Association

To begin, would you please introduce GMIA to Pharmaceutical Executive readers?

The GMIA is an industry organization. Its six members are: Alphapharm, Apotex, Genepharm, Hospira, Sandoz and Sigma. The GMiA is the lobby group for the generic medicines industry in Australia, working with all relevant stakeholders, such as government, prescribers, dispensers, the community and consumer groups. Generic medicines make up around 30% of the volume of the PBS.

As the founding director of the association, what have been the main achievements and milestones since GMIA was created in 2001?

Since its commencement in 2001, the GMIA has always had a “place at the table”. As a result, the GMiA is an active member of the Pharmaceutical Industry Working Group, the newly formed Pharmaceutical Industry Strategy Group, the Pharmaceutical Industry Council, and the Pharmaceutical Industry Action Agenda, the Therapeutic Industry Consultative Council, the Drug Utilisation Sub Committee of the PBAC, the Pharmaceutical Benefits Pricing Authority, APAC, PHARM and the Medicines Partnership of Australia.

In a fairly small number of years you’ve been given a seat at the table, and obviously with that exposure get a perception for the government’s commitment to the pharmaceutical industry, and generics in particular. How would you rate the government’s commitment to fostering an attractive

business environment for such activities?

The Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research has established a Pharmaceutical Industry Strategy Group to develop proposals aimed at industry development which he plans to take forward to his Cabinet colleagues later this year. The GMiA is pleased to be part of this process. Unfortunately, unlike other comparable countries, there is no generic specific policy in Australia aimed at increasing usage of generic medicines.

Why is that?

Well, it is not for the lack of lobbying.

What is GMIA doing to change this?

We will be discussing our ideas with Government. For this to be the case, there must be some disconnect between GMIA's perception of generics' value and the government's perception. The current Government does acknowledge that a strong generic sector is important for the long-term sustainability of the PBS. We look forward to working with them to grow this sector in Australia.

What is the GMIA's perspective on the PBS reform in terms of fairness towards generics and the impact it will have going forward?

As I said earlier, the PBS reforms do not include a specific policy for generics. However, as an industry association we look forward to working closely with all key stakeholders to further broaden the market for generic medicines within Australia.

To what degree is doctor awareness a roadblock in GMIA's way?

I am not sure if this is a roadblock because around 97% of scrips are left open, that is, substitution by the pharmacist is not disallowed.

One of the stated goals of GMIA is to bring up the share of generics to 50%, from its current level of 30%. What kind of growth drivers will be necessary to achieve this objective?

As I said earlier, the GMiA is considering possible options to put to Government. However, as it has been shown in Europe in particular, one of the ways to increase generic usage is through public information campaigns. It is important that consumers understand that generics are safe, quality and effective medicines and that they can save money if they choose a generic as well as supporting the PBS. We are pleased to be involved in the development of the generic awareness campaign which the National Prescribing Service is managing on behalf of the Department of

Health and Ageing.

With the new Rudd government and Ministry of Innovation headed by Kim Carr, there seems to be a good sign for innovators. What consequences do you see for generics companies?

Minister Carr has invited all sectors of the industry, generics included, to be involved in the Pharmaceutical Industry Strategy Group which has been given the task of developing policy options for him to take to Cabinet later this year.

With international competition from countries in the region like South Korea, India, and China, how will Australia stay ahead of the curve in terms of remaining a destination for pharmaceutical manufacturing?

The challenge for the Pharmaceutical Industry Strategy Group is to develop options that will ensure we are able to capture future industry investment in Australia. I would hope to be able to say more on this after next year’s Budget.

What will be the main initiatives that GMIA will push forward in the next five to 10 years?

GMiA will continue to lobby for greater generic-friendly pricing and regulatory systems. It’s premature to say what the current policy changes will mean for the sector but they do provide the opportunity to continue to work with government to improve the operating environment in this country.

What is your final message to Pharmaceutical Executive readers on the future of the generics landscape in Australia?

The GMiA remains committed to working with government to grow the sector in Australia to a level similar to that in other comparable countries.

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