

# Interview with Yves Groult, Managing Director, Boiron Hungary

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**Hungary has one of the oldest drug industries in Europe, but homeopathy too has quite a history in the country, with the Homoeopathic Doctor's Association being founded as early as 1864. Do you feel that –today- homeopathy has taken its rightful position within the Hungarian healthcare system?**

First of all, there is a strong tradition in Hungary in having recourse to more natural products. I believe that the public has been quite disappointed with the health system in general. People would not really have a say in their treatments, and at one point started to increasingly take care of their own health to some extent. The Hungarian population is also very eager not only to take care of themselves, but also to know more about healing processes. They read a lot and want to be in charge of their health.

**Would you say that there is still room for improvement in terms of awareness for homeopathy in Hungary today?**

I am sure that there is still room for improvement, especially when it comes to the professionals out there. Some physicians are not yet open to new alternatives but a growing number of them shows genuine interest although lacking precious time for training. Integrating homeopathy into a daily practice may also be challenging as consultation time available for each patient is often limited. Unless you claim distinctive competency in the field of homeopathy and adjust your practice accordingly, which is not really possible here in Hungary. However, the fact that we have had the opportunity to receive the visit from the Health Minister during a researcher's reading at a congress

shows that there is some interest from the policymakers and the medical community.

**What are the key arguments you can bring to the table when lobbying for the importance of homeopathy?**

There are several points, but for the healthcare system it is particularly important that homeopathy can be a cost-effective solution. Homeopathy has a role to play in avoiding initial costs of treatment as well as recurrence of some pathologies. In many countries, patients all too often have a strong recourse to grab toward anti-biotics. In particular in France, some studies have shown that patients treated with homeopathic costs will not only cost less, but the respective recurrence of the pathology will also go down. There is thus a significant role to play for homeopathy within the healthcare system.

In addition to this, and from a strict therapeutic point of view, there are some areas where homeopathy and our medications provide a real “plus” for patients while conventional medicine has little to offer (atopic dermatitis, eczema..). But beyond being an alternative, our medicines are, as growing use in hospital practice shows for serious pathologies, complimentary to conventional treatments. They can lessen their side effects and improve compliance to them, thereby providing patients a better quality of life.

**Boiron has now been present in Hungary for 7 years. What are you most proud of of what has been achieved in this time?**

I am very proud of the visibility we have managed to achieve in the market place, especially in the OTC market, together with the notoriety gained by the Boiron brand, and the trust put in it by customers and professionals.

In France, where the parent company is established, we are often referred to as one of the best partners for pharmacists. According to surveys, we come first or second. Maybe the root of the matter is that the company was founded and is still owned and run by pharmacists, which is a highly unusual position in today’s pharmaceutical industry.

It was thus nothing to be surprised at that Boiron should become in Hungary, one of the pioneers to help pharmacists realize that they do have an opportunity to take a more active role. This change of behaviour to which Boiron makes its contribution can be beneficial for the entire OTC business in Hungary. While one should bear in mind that OTC business, from an economic point of view, may also be instrumental in helping maintain pharmaceutical service level in general.

**Five years ago, the French headquarters drastically increased its budget for international clinical trials. In Romania for example, country manager Silvia Mainescu was saying that this created new opportunities. Do you see similar potential here in Hungary?**

One of the factors to choose the location to conduct clinical trials still remains the cost, for which other countries have been better off than Hungary to date. However, it is an activity I intend to increase here in the future.

**In terms of global portfolio, we have seen that Oscillococcinum is still the most sold homeopathic drug in the entire world, but other products such as the cough syrup Stodal have also been successful in many markets. Can you elaborate on what the local portfolio of Boiron Hungary looks like, and what is going to be driving your growth over the coming years?**

These two products will indeed remain the key growth drivers, at least for the next 3 years. We also have a number of new products in the registration process at the moment. However, local restructuring of the health care system has been slowing down applications for new products. A lot of work remains to be done for our 2 key products as well, as there is still room for expansion.

**Last year you have also spent significant promotional efforts on getting Amigel out there. In your view, what is a successful launch strategy here in Hungary, in order to achieve the right acceptance of the medical community and the patients?**

Once again, our visibility achieved can be misleading for observers. True, we did make quite significant efforts to promote this product although we “spent” as you put it, quite little...

Brand awareness achieved through a crisp and professional communication is quite satisfactory. However acquaintance process with the product by Hungarian sports people who were primarily targeted takes time. The same goes for professionals, particularly physiotherapists who have shown great interest. Let us say we are still in the seeding phase and are confident in the product success in this segment in the long term. However, following the examples of other Boiron OTC products, Arnigel remains a great family product which should be present in everyone’s medicines cabinet. To this aim, we may reconsider repositioning the product while capitalizing on awareness already achieved.

Otherwise, a successful launch strategy is the same as anywhere else in Europe, and will depend on having the right marketing mix. From the input of my marketing team, I do understand that having the right price is important in the OTC niche, where the psychological barriers play a role in the purchasing process. And of course, the product perceived benefits.

**Taking a look at the people within the organization, we know attracting people in the pharma sector is not always easy. What motivates your people to work for Boiron Hungary rather than one of your competitors?**

To some extent, it may play a role that some of the applicants feel attracted by the French heritage of the company and by the naturalness of our medicines. However, in terms of recruitment we

target business people for their practical approach to problems although they eventually end up displaying other personal skills than business skills.

In this respect, the company provides a lot of room for personal development. In this way, people can continuously grow within an environment where they can think and work on a project basis. There is great flexibility, aspects we also find back at the headquarters in France. Within the Group in general, there is a very low turnover overall. People enjoy working in an environment and on a company project that gives sense to what they do.

**On a more personal level, how would you define your personal management style as a French manager in Hungary?**

Trust and team spirit are two very important elements for me. I provide my counterparts with significant autonomy in dealing with projects while being myself quite demanding in setting objectives and expected outcome.

**To wrap up, where would you like to see Boiron in Hungary in the coming 3 to 5 years?**

I would like to continue building on the notoriety of the Boiron brand that we have managed to establish in Hungary through customer satisfaction with our OTC products. I intend to be an active player of the family self-medication market, relying on a fruitful partnership with my pharmacists colleagues.

**What is your final message on the commitment of Boiron to Hungary?**

It goes without saying that I would like this achievement to reflect on the awareness and recognition of homeopathy as a useful and effective alternative by patients and professionals.

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