

# Interview with Patrick van Ginneken, Country Manager for Pfizer Poland, Pfizer Polska

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**You have been appointed at the head of Pfizer Poland last December. 2010 is a hot year for the group – even very hot for some of the top management – What has been the most challenging thing for you to deal with in this first year in Poland?**

The most challenging part in 2010 for Pfizer Poland was the healthcare changes and the impact it had on the reimbursement system, which created a lot of nervousness, insecurity and uncertainty of future outlooks. Although it did not really impact directly the way Pfizer has been running its operations as such – the challenging part as far as Pfizer was concerned was to meet the expectations of the company – it is crucial for any company to anticipate changes, especially in this industry. Even though I have been only one year at Pfizer Poland, I tried to anticipate but it is hard to know exactly what the affiliate will go through. The reforms are coming in such a way that they appear much more severe than all of us sitting at INFARMA were seeing it.

**Change is actually one major topic that we like to cover when we do special country reports on the pharmaceutical industries. The General Manager of GSK Poland said to us yesterday that the affiliate has developed a survival mechanism. How do you evaluate Pfizer's capability to respond and react to these major changes?**

As a global player we have in a sense a very broad spectrum of products, not only in the pipeline but also already available, ranging from basic medicines up to highly innovative medicines. Adapting to change is about selecting the right ones that are fitting the needs of the patients and the ability of the Polish payer to afford them.

**Pfizer's key success factor in Poland in the coming months will consist of its ability to deal with a rapidly changing market environment, taking into accounts both the customers' needs and the financial and regulatory context. The new challenge for the years to come will be to adapt to the new reform on healthcare. What are your expectations in this regard?**

I am relatively optimistic for the future of Pfizer in Poland. The reform will indeed bring a serious calibration, but the company already experienced it to a great extent in 2010. At Pfizer Poland, we have already shifted gears from a unique Research and Development (R&D) perspective to a combined focus on R&D and medicines that are already off-patent. We are starting to see the positive effects of this strategy.

**As you mentioned, one of the biggest challenges faced by innovators today is the expiration of patents for blockbusters and a historically poor pipeline to replace them. For instance, the group will soon lose the Lipitor Patent – the world's most selling drug – How can Pfizer Poland reinvent itself in a way and remain sustainable?**

In emerging markets of Central and Eastern Europe, the connotation of what is R&D, what is off-patent, what is generic, or what originator drug is, is not that clearly defined by our customers. Lipitor has already been off patent in Poland for several years, even if it was not the case on a global scale. We already had to cope with this issue in our country. In that sense, compared to the several other Pfizer organizations globally, we are in a less difficult shape of dealing with off patent realities

I would like to talk with you now about the long history of Pfizer in Poland. One of the first companies in the market together with Teva and Sandoz, Pfizer is actually the oldest

**Multinationals (MNC) in Poland, with presence established since 1958. Nonetheless the company only ranks top 6 in the country. How do you explain this poor performance?**

This below-average performance, compared to the rest of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) developed markets can be explained by what the company has been focusing on. It is about the business model that Pfizer applied in Poland, focusing very much on R&D and not on a more balanced approach between R&D and off-patent medicines. That is one of the core reasons why we are underperforming in terms of market shares versus the other GDP developed markets. It was however not only about resources and selecting the right strategies. In the Polish market the governmental payer is quite sophisticated and focused on cost-control, this provides significant access hurdles in getting the innovative medicines, especially retail medicines, fully reimbursed. They are less restrictive in specialty care, but in retail they are quite restrictive.

**What is the strategic importance of Poland, not only in terms of sales but for also other activities such as clinical trials?**

When talking in terms of sales, Poland, with a thirty eight million population is a large and a GDP growing market, already high amongst the new EU member states. Most importantly one needs to see Poland as having a stable market. From a macro economic perspective the market is more predictable, it is therefore an interesting market. In terms of clinical trials, Poland has a long history of high quality clinical research with many years of experience. In that sense, for Pfizer inc. Poland has been and will continue to be an area of significant focus.

**Being sustainable in the Polish market for such a long time, and being acknowledged as one of the market leaders implies that Pfizer has maintained its core values of a customer and employees-centred approach to business, especially in terms of Corporate Social Responsibility. What are Pfizer Poland initiatives in this respect?**

Pfizer Poland started in 2010 to very actively move away from a customer and product focus to become more customer centric. This enabled the group to build value propositions beyond pure promoting of the value of individual products, but to look more deeply into what the customer in his essence needs. Amongst the colleagues, the appreciation of the organization is high, although it can always be improved. In terms of the firm's reputation from the outside Pfizer is seen as a very good place to work, stable and traditional.

One of the elements that has given us reasons to stay within the market place and systematically grow, even if we are not as strongly performing compared to other GDP developed markets, is business ethics. Pfizer has always been a fore fighter of business ethics. The way we interact with our customers, the transparency we want to create in that respect, are crucial for us, because – let us be fair – the pharmaceutical industry in the past did not have the best image. I am proud to say that Pfizer is a company highly dedicated to maintain high standards of ethics. Even if it means sometimes that we want and have to walk away from business opportunities

**Usually within this industry it is quite hard not only to attract the best talents but also to retain them. How does Pfizer manage to do that here in Poland?**

In the past, the company was not that active in attracting talent because there was a steady growth and the focus had turned to retaining talent. Keeping the best people is first and foremost about recognition of someone's individuality and putting that into a performance framework. But it is also about really recognizing that every individual is different and should be able within that framework to operate differently. Secondly, it is about making sure colleagues receive the right coaching and training in order to do their jobs effectively. It is the advantage of having a global company, with a large amount of positions all across the world, that offer suitable jobs for real talented people that are ambitious and have demonstrated records. Pfizer has proved to be very strong last year in moving and exporting its talents globally. We are thus in a good position to offer Polish colleagues an interesting development plan.

Thirdly, it is about making sure everyone understands what we stand for, that we have common

goals: collaborate to improve health for Polish citizens.

**How challenging is it to implement this common goal for everyone to work in the same direction?**

It is challenging since Pfizer has such a broad range of products and customers it needs to face. But at the end of the day, we are not in the business of selling pills; we are in the business of providing our customers and their patients a hope for a better health and a higher quality of life. Looking from that perspective, it becomes less important what kinds of medicines we sell to our customers than our ability to make them help patients have better lives. Put this way, it is a common denominator of what we stand for.

**How was it for yourself to work for the group. Over the past year what has been the worse part, and the best surprise?**

As the head of Pfizer Poland, what positively surprised me was the engagement of my colleagues to make a difference. Both the personnel on the field and the internal staff are very much dedicated to create value. I am also very well surprised by the already granularity of our business processes, when I compare to what I am used to in Western Europe. I expected high performance, but the performance even exceeded my expectations.

**How did you judge the overall lifestyle offered in Poland and the level of professionalism?**

I do think there is a difference. It is of course very narrow, but my working experience within the group and outside of Pfizer allows me to say that Polish are very dedicated people. They are hard-working – often beyond normal hours -, very much task orientated and very well skilled. The area where there is room for growth is to move from a predominantly task-oriented to a more balanced goal-oriented approach to work, in order to better meet the expectations. Polish workers really look for what they can achieve, and this is an opportunity for us as an organization to create more value for our customers.

**Since you have been appointed about a year ago, what are your hopes and objectives for Pfizer Poland in the coming few years?**

My personal goal – it is also an objective for the company as a whole – is that in two or three years, we will be reaching the same market shares as we have in the rest of the GDP markets, Poland being such a large market, we must have ambitious goals. We received enormous support from the Company and Poland is now really well positioned to become a significant contributor of growth and value for Pfizer.

I have a number of more specific personal goals, which many of my colleagues share with me. We have a fantastic medicine for vaccination and our purpose is really to make sure that every child in Poland will get vaccination to be protected against the disastrous effects of pneumococcal

infection. Secondly, our heritage is very much in cardio-vascular (CV) diseases, so with everything that we have in terms of knowledge and products, with what is coming out of the pipeline, we set ourselves an ambition that we will make modest contribution to improve treatments for CV diseases in Poland.

**As many of the managers at the head of big pharma companies in Poland are Polish natives, how challenging is it to be a foreigner in Poland?**

It is challenging in the sense that I strongly believe that every colleague who is working in a pharmaceutical company, at least for commercial positions, should be as close as possible to his customers. I cannot ignore the fact that for a non-Polish citizen, the language is difficult. Even if a lot of customers are very skilled in English, it is a matter of essential respect for me to speak a basic level of Polish as the country manager. When engaging with key stakeholders, medical or governmental, the language has been a problem for me so far. I am taking lessons however it is still not easy to make a conversation in the Polish. It is essential to know the language of the local market in any organization, if you have a customer facing responsibility.

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