Interview with Michel Abiteboul, VP Corporate Development of Quintiles , Quintiles France

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Tags: Quintiles France

As Quintiles is present in all major pharmaceutical markets worldwide, what's the relevance of the French affiliate and what role it plays inside such a globalized organization?

France is important to Quintiles not only because it is in itself a major pharmaceutical market itself but also because many of Quintiles' services are offered out of our French offices – .It is an integral part of Quintiles global infrastructure.

Quintiles France has a strong clinical monitoring team responsible for a wide range of clinical research projects across a spectrum of therapeutic areas. We have a very strong project management department based in France covering local and global projects, and our Global head of l CNS (Central Nervous System) projects is based in Paris. Furthermore, we have a large data facility in Strasbourg, employing 250 of the 650 talented professionals we have in France in total.

Quintiles France also has an important expertise in regulatory affairs . On top of that, I am part of the consulting group at Quintiles that offers counsel to biopharmaceutical companies about how to reach their strategic goals, which in today's rapidly changing environment often involves strategic alliances and risk-sharing.

In summary in France Quintiles has an engaged and talented workforce providing a wide range of clinical solutions for our biopharma customers.

What are the main advantages of basing these operations in France and not elsewhere?

Clearly France is a very important and dynamic market for the international biopharmaceutical industry – and for our business it is very important to be close to where the future users and prescribers are. Thus, researching the drugs in the country or region where they are marketed is essential.

Secondly, France has a large and very mature health care system with a dynamic hospital base from which Quintiles can benefit considerably. Some of these hospitals are at the forefront of knowledge with CNS as one of their main strengths, as well as oncology, cardiovascular and anti-infectives areas with a unique network of investigators.

A major market with a wide health care coverage and a considerable network of top investigators makes France an ideal country for Quintiles to establish itself.

How challenging it is to recruit patients and do clinical trials in France compared to other places?

This is a major challenge and we have clearly seen a lot of activities moving to Eastern Europe, as well as outside of Europe to the East and South. Thus we have to be smarter and more efficient to make sure that France can provide high-quality patients in order to proceed with clinical trials. It is imperative that we develop an intimate relationship with investigators' sites.

In this model Quintiles acts as an ally with its partner sites – providing support in terms of training, IT and in some instances site personnel. In terms this allows the site to focus on the patient and recruiting the right subjects into the right studies at the right time. This is the smart way to respond to the globalization of clinical research.

We have also developed a very close relationship with the regulatory authorities so we can truly understand what they are trying to achieve. In order to improve the system and work together bridging the industry and the public good, we have close contact with senior executives in the regulatory authorities in France and Europe. That gives Quintiles better insights and understanding about how to position clinical trial submissions, The goal is to make sure we keep the finger on the pulse and be aware of what's going on in the French and European health care system.

In a previous interview you highlighted the importance of the French biotech sector for the future of the local pharmaceutical industry and Quintiles' operations in the country. However, the local biotech industry still lags behind some of its neighbor countries' industries such as Germany and the UK. How is Quintiles helping the local industry to further advance?

I agree that the French biotech industry still lags behind other European countries such as the UK, Germany and even Switzerland – a fast growing market. But even though the French biotech industry has been particularly affected by the financial crisis, important steps were taken in recent

years to speed the progress in this area.

To catch up internationally France needs to partner and invest more in the biotech industry. Quintiles is doing its part by helping biotechs design their development plans and regulatory strategies. The growth factor is to try to become closer and closer to the good investigators sides and research institutes and to develop tools, processes and standardization in order to have a fluid data exchange around clinical trials.

Some blame this lagging-behind as a fruit of the big distance between academic research and the industry in France. What's your assessment over this?

We've lost years – not to say decades – in terms of partnering between the public academic sector and the industry. Now those things have changed. One of the main drivers in recent years has been the Pôles de Compétitivité. Its clear objective is to bring the industry, the private sector, the academy and research centers together to try to deliver innovation and technology. This is positive, especially because on top of that there are financial incentives. But you don't transform the situation overnight – it takes time.

In France we have a very complex research system with multiple layers that make it difficult for foreigners to understand how our research system actually works. L'ALLIANCE now renamed AVIESAN is another national effort to try to harmonize, simplify and standardize research while bringing focus to different public organizations that were working isolated. The new generation has moved beyond the traditional barriers that used to exist between the public and the private French sectors and they are now starting to work together. This will take time but France is gearing in the right direction –however other countries are moving fast, thus we need to increase efforts such as public and private partnerships so we can catch up.

Quintiles is the world leader not only in clinical research but also in a number of other services towards the pharmaceutical industry. How is this leadership translated to the French pharmaceutical market and how is Quintiles responding to the fast changing market trends?

Quintiles describes the rapidly changing world of the biopharmaceutical industry as the New Health. It's a world in which the rules are changing on every front. The old vertically integrated model of a pharma company that relies on blockbusters is gone. To succeed in the New Health, biopharma companies must increase their speed to market, maximize productivity, overcome complexity and, most importantly, deliver enhanced value for patients. No company wants to see its product collapse in the end of phase III as we have seen several times recently or even just before going to market.

Besides speed to market and risk-sharing, payers are another major issue for the biopharma. Payers are demanding additional data to demonstrate real world value for patients. If you bring all these changes together you create a major need for transformation in the biopharma industry.

What we in Quintiles do – as the leading biopharmaceutical services provider – is to try to help our customers navigate the New Health. . We do that by providing services in four major areas: clinical development servicescommercial solutions, where we have sales representatives, marketing expertise, brand managers and market access strategists to help companies maximize patient benefits and economic outcomes of the lifecycle of a drug;consulting, which helps the biopharma companies transform to succeed in the New Health landscape; and our capital solutions group, which focuses on non-traditional risk-sharing alliances. Since 2000, Quintiles has secured more than US$2.4 billion in investment commitments driving more than 80 non-traditional alliances.

Quintiles is unique in the breadth and agility of our services and solutions across the clinical, commercial, consulting and capital spectrum. We can really help the biopharmaceutical industry transform and adapt to the New Health. With 20,000 talented professionals operating from offices in 60 countries, we global capabilities and local knowledge – which is vital to help biopharmaceutical companies navigate risks and seize opportunities in today's challenging business environment.

This is what Quintiles is offering globally and how France fits in. Quintiles is talking to French-based customers about all these issues we have talked about applied to the local market – how to speed-up their development processes; how they could better arrange their organization, preparing them to reach a next stage and helping to promote products and finance some of the risks. Quintiles is not a CRO (clinical research organization). We are the world's only fully integrated biopharmaceutical services company. We can and do provide customers high-quality, cost-effective tactical services. But increasingly they need strategic solutions – long-scale functional resourcing, risk-based strategic alliances, new development and commercialization models, etc. – to help them achieve their financial and strategic goals. With Quintiles, customers have an ally that can deliver both.

However, as the market leader the game is your to lose. How is Quintiles going to maintain its leadership in the coming years?

Quintiles spends a considerable amount of time thinking about what will be the future needs of the industry so we can be ahead of these changes. We are trying to develop now the services that will fulfill the needs of tomorrow. Our wide array of services gives Quintiles a pretty strong basis to move ahead of the competition and maintain its market leadership in France and worldwide.

Big corporations like Quintiles, who are widely known and recognized throughout the market, normally don't struggle to attract the best talent available in the labor market.

However, once people are already in, big companies struggle to maintain them motivated and inside their umbrella for too long. What is your strategy to be the employer of choice not only in the short term but long term as well?

That’s a continuous challenge because you want to attract the best and most talented people that will have a positive impact on the organization and give better services to our customers. As you said, by being the market leader we don’t have a problem attracting the best people. But in order to retain them inside the organization there is no easy answer. Quintiles pays close attention to what our people want to do in their career and try to help them finding the right spot, keeping them there by offering them real challenges to keep the staff motivated.

What will be your final message to the readers of Pharmaceutical Executive in France and worldwide?

The biopharmaceutical industry is in a very dynamic and challenging stage and as usual the ones that are really willing to transform themselves and innovate will not only survive but grow and benefit from these changes. In every crisis and unstable environment you have challenges and opportunities. Quintiles is here to help biopharma companies choose the winning strategies and increase their participation in the national and international pharmaceutical market.

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