

Interview: Fabrizio Giombini - General Manager, MSD Romania



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One of the so-called 'new generation' of pharmaceutical GMs in Romania outlines his first impressions of the local market and details how MSD has managed to shape in-country developments in the infectious disease segment and oncology.

You have been working in the industry for 26 years and always with MSD. Since taking over as GM for Romania 15 months ago, what have been your main priorities?

I arrived in Romania last January and it has been a great learning experience. The environment is challenging but there are also real opportunities. For a GM it is particularly important to understand the difficulties as well as exploiting untapped potential. To be successful in Romania, one has to be flexible, working in an environment that is continuously changing and where there is a lack of stability. Indeed within the last six years we have had six new ministers of health. One also needs to be resilient. With all the challenges that the market faces, it is important to maintain a positive approach, trying to find opportunities even when faced with significant problems.

I am fortunate to be working for MSD, a fantastic company, and the reason for which I have been here for over 25 years. In Romania we have a talented team of committed employees, where we all share the same ambition, namely to deliver new innovative medicine to local market, improving the health of patients. At the heart of our new global strategy is the idea of custom centricity, where the key aim is to cater to our customers' needs.

Can you give us an overview of MSD's activities in Romania today?

We have a portfolio of more than 50 innovative medicines across the majority of therapeutic areas, including in diabetes, immunology, oncology, respiratory and cardiovascular disease. This is one of our main strengths allowing us to cover for the needs of a large part of the population.

We offer prescription drugs as well as vaccines with a strong pipeline. Globally, in the next three to four years, MSD will be launching 10 significant new products and allowing for the right political and reimbursement climate, these will be launched in Romania. In the particular in the next few years we will be delivering innovative drugs in the sectors of hepatitis C and oncology, with a focus on melanoma and lung cancer.

As a part of our value proposition we also work closely with the local community and are very committed to our CSR work. We want to work with the authorities on the issue of maternal mortality, in particular in the rural areas, where the country has real improvements to make. As a company we feel a strong responsibility to help improve the quality of life for Romanians and we do so in partnership with the authorities. We are part of a special healthcare task-force called the Coalition for the Development of Romania, working directly under the auspices of the prime minister, to find solutions to the country's medical needs. This independent task force unites all key healthcare actors.

MSD is an R&D driven company, with a focus on innovation. What is the importance attached to clinical trials in Romania as part of this process?

Indeed, we are a strong research company. In the last three years we invested more than USD 20 billion in R&D worldwide across all therapeutic areas. We are committed to investing in clinical trials in Romania, especially for hepatitis C and oncology. Romania has many centres of excellence, even in comparison with other western countries and can become a clinical trials platform for the region.

What importance do the Romanian authorities attach to bringing innovation to the market?

Romanian is not considered today, in comparison with other EU Member States, as a country where innovation is a main priority of our politicians and stakeholders. Bringing innovative drugs to the local market over the last five year has been a real challenge due to the political instability. When we eventually reach an agreement with the authority's regarding a new reimbursements methodology, the minister of health is replaced and subsequently we have to start the process

anew. Last year we made some progress regarding a new reimbursements system and have been successful in delivering innovative treatments, yet there remains a long way to go, with numerous important medicines in areas such as oncology and hepatitis that are still not available in the country. We are ready to partner with the authorities to bring new innovative treatments to the market.

Tell us about your approach for successful navigating the regulatory landscape and what are the avenues for growth?

There are opportunities with a large population that is in need of new therapies. We have more than two million people with diabetes in Romania of which only six hundred thousand are treated. There are opportunities for innovative companies to improve the health of patients and we are working closely with the authorities on cervical cancer, and diabetes as well as running awareness raising campaigns on HIV.

Hepatitis C is a flagship area where MSD is renowned. What is the state of affairs in Romania?

Romania is a country with a high prevalence of hepatitis C patients. You still have drugs consumed in the country that were being used ten year ago in the rest of Europe. Since last year the hepatitis C market has been suffering a lot, decreasing by more than 35 percent, with patients waiting for the new therapies that are still not available.

We are very committed to improving this situation, with new drugs soon to be launched and in two to three years from now we will have additional innovation in this filed. More globally, Hepatitis C is one of the strategic areas of MSD.

Last year you ranked seventh on the local market, with a market share of around 4 percent. What is your strategy for maintaining and bettering the performance of MSD in the country?

As a company we are extremely ambitious. Our strengths comes from an ability to rely on a strong pipeline, which we believe to be one of the best in the industry. Our strategy is to be among the top five companies in Romania in the next three to five years. This will largely depend our ability to bring innovative drugs to the market and a reimbursement framework that will encourage this process. I believe MSD will remain a strong player in the country, due to our pipeline, our initiatives and most importantly our dedication to Romanian patients.

On a personal level, as a relative new GM in Romania, how will you measure your success?

I will be judged on results, ensuring the MSD continues on a path of sustainable growth. I am a managing director that cares passionately about our employees, with an objective to export Romanian talent to other countries.

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