Interview: Christophe Lala – General Manager Western Europe, GE Healthcare, France



11.02.2016

Tags: Pharma, Pharmaceuticals, France, Christophe Lala, GE Healthcare, Healthcare, Digitalization, Europe, Cloud, Personalized Medicine, Early Diagnosis, Interview, Insight, Exclusive, Free

Christophe Lala, general manager of Western Europe at GE Healthcare, reveals how today the challenge is to ensure that all patients in France have access to the same medical pathway; how the future of medicine lies in early diagnosis and individually tailored treatments, what is known as personalized medicine; and why GE Healthcare will have an important role to play in this process.

GE Healthcare claims it wants to shape a new era of patient care. How will you set about achieving this?

Our company is structured around a certain number of product lines and services: medical imaging and information technologies, medical diagnostics, patient monitoring systems, performance improvement, as well as the development of new drugs and biopharmaceutical manufacturing technologies. Today the challenge is to ensure that all patients in France have access to the same medical pathway, while reducing the deficit in the healthcare budget, something to which the Minister of Health, Marisol Touraine attaches a great deal of importance. This is also a focus for GE Healthcare´s clients. Our products and services can play a role in this process, allowing us to offer our clients horizontal solutions with different payment structures, such as risk sharing and profit sharing models. Today we already have a wide variety of products, and by acquiring GE Partners in 2010, a consulting company, we have extended our ability to respond with outcome-based selling. This is an approach designed to identify, and then incorporate, a patient’s needs into a solution

that benefits both the buyer and seller. An outcomes-based approach also enables companies to create more strategic, longer-lasting partnerships with customers, based on shared risk and reward.

What role do industrialists, and in particular GE Healthcare, have in ensuring that all patients in France have access to the same medical pathway?

It is true that numerous industrialists complain about the French system. Speaking personally, I have worked in emerging markets and I greatly value the fact that good quality healthcare is accessible to all in a country like France. Our role as manufacturers is to ensure that this remains the case, and that there is always a place for innovation. It is only through innovations that France's healthcare system will become more efficient. It is not because healthcare is free that we can offer the most expensive treatment, no matter the diagnosis. The future of medicine lies in early diagnosis and individually tailored treatments, what is known as personalized medicine, delivering the right treatment to the patient at the right time. Imaging is essential to patient-tailored therapy treatments and for the follow-up of disease progression. For personalized medicine to reach its full potential, medical imaging must be an integral part of our healthcare system. Hospitals must become centers of excellence, prepared for a paradigm shift where patients spend the least amount of time possible within the hospital, leading to changes in training, in research and in clinical practice.

You say that today the challenge is to ensure that all patients in France have access to the same medical pathway. A patient does not receive one single treatment from a drug or a medical device, but requires a combination of the two. Yet in France we have the impression that pharma and medical device companies act in silos. Is it therefore really possible to build a new era in patent care without more cooperation between these two sectors?

We do need to work harder to find synergies throughout the patient's healthcare journey. The process is already complicated enough within a large conglomerate such as GE Healthcare. Ensuring each department is an expert in its given area, while still being able to find synergies with other relevant parts of the business, can be a challenge. That said, within a common objective, different sectors can work together. Biomedicine may well break down barriers between the pharma and medical devices industries, linked once again to personalized healthcare. However, the complexity of having everyone work together will remain an enduring reality for a long time to come. Breaking down such barriers will depend not only on the will of industrialists, but also on the medical community. Our healthcare system, and the organizations of the medical profession, must

have the desire to work horizontally and not purely vertically.

You have been the general manager for Western Europe at GE Healthcare for two years now. What have been your main priorities since you took up your position?

Our first priority is always to organize ourselves around our clients and patients, the fundamentals of our business. When it comes to outcome-based selling, our focus must be the client. With our traditional approach at GE Healthcare, that of a box-selling model, you have a company of engineers with the highest level of quality, producing the best possible products and associated services. Quality remains essential, but today we also need to spend more time understanding the needs of clients.

Another focus of mine has been the digitalization of the healthcare industry. This process can play an important role in reducing the deficit in the healthcare budget, but the medical devices sector has been slow to grasp this opportunity. My aim is to see how GE Healthcare can develop new services, new business models. We have a tendency to say that France, in general, is slow to adapt to global changes. When it comes to the healthcare sector, France is certainly moving. My priority is to ensure that GE Healthcare adapts to the changes taking place within our industry.

Tell us more about the opportunities you see with the digitalization of the healthcare industry.

As an anecdote, today when you go to a hospital in France, you must first physically register with the receptionist. In comparison, when you board a plane, you have a digital boarding pass already on your smartphone. The communication between healthcare professionals and patients is still done via paper. Digitalization is not a strategy; it is an accelerator. It allows patients to stay connected to healthcare professionals, ensuring that they utilize their medicines correctly. This is a point of major significance. Treatments can only be efficient if the patient follows to the letter their prescription, something which is far from certain.

How does GE Healthcare plan to stay ahead of new ambitious competitors that are entering this field?

With the GE Health Cloud, we will have a data and logistics platform comparable to an App store. Designed exclusively for the healthcare industry, the new cloud ecosystem will connect radiologists and clinicians across care pathways with speed and efficiency, both inside and outside the hospital setting. It will connect to our imaging machines, shifting image post-processing capabilities from on-site machines to the cloud. Images will be computed in the cloud and sent back to doctors. The

GE Health Cloud and apps will give clinicians on-demand, flexible computing power that can be scaled up or down. At the same time, we intend to attract independent software vendors (ISVs) to develop their apps in the new cloud ecosystem, thus providing a whole new business model.

Today we have 400 engineers at our Buc site in France (which is also our European HQ and has manufacturing capability), including a team developing this software. Our IT division is currently one of the most dynamic aspects of our business. Connecting devices to reduce the duration of hospitalization, and promoting outpatient care, is the direction of travel within our industry. It is information technology and software developments that will allow this evolution to occur. Reducing the overall cost of health systems has become a global priority. Innovation is more than ever essential, but must be considered from a different angle. We try above all to see how today, thanks to technology, we can shorten hospitalization times, to better control and optimize treatments from both a patient and a cost perspective.

What would be the ultimate message you would like to send to our audience about France and GE Healthcare?

Working in the healthcare industry is an honor. I have had the privilege of being in this environment for 25 years now. I am proud to have contributed to improving the lives of patients. France throughout its history has been at the heart of much of the world´s medicinal progress. As GE Healthcare we have a strong footprint in France. Our aim is to be an industrial player that works to develop the French healthcare system. GE Healthcare is one of the world's leading manufacturers of medical imaging equipment. Present in France since 1987, we have developed strong research partnerships with SMEs and research centers to develop technologies and transformational medical services that open a new era of patient care. Looking beyond GE Healthcare, GE as a whole has its second largest number of employees in France, after only the US. A key objective of mine is to continue attracting the best talent and to play a part in ensuring that France remains an extremely attractive healthcare market. This country will have an important role to play in establishing a model for the healthcare of the future; and as leader in our own field, GE Healthcare will have an important role to play in this process.

Click here to read more articles and interviews from France, and to download the latest free pharma report on the country.

See more interviews