Interview: Aarnoud Overkamp – Managing Director, Takeda Netherlands



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Takeda's goal is to become a trusted and reliable partner in the healthcare system by better understanding patients' needs. Aarnoud Overkamp, general manager of the Dutch subsidiary, shares his perspective on the challenges faced by the local healthcare system, the importance of Takeda-ism in the organization, and finding innovative ways to meet the new expectations of both patients and doctors.

You joined Takeda, the largest Japanese pharmaceutical company, almost five years ago. Which elements of the Japanese business culture particularly impressed you when you took over?

I can only be very positive when it comes to the Japanese culture and the way headquarters interacts with our subsidiary in the Netherlands, as they particularly appreciate long-term thinking and strategic mindset. Takeda's core values truly give you the feeling of belonging to an organization with a clear purpose. It is true that every company has its own core values, but what really makes a difference is how you bring them to life in your daily operations. According to our CEO Christophe Weber, Takeda's first priority is the patient, then society, and thirdly our reputation. Business results are also, of course, a priority – but they emerge from these four automatically. If this is your line of thinking and you display it to all your employees as a CEO, it is

a strong message about the way to conduct business on a global as well as local scale. It is also a great leap forward to improving the reputation of the pharmaceutical industry, for which there is a need in the Netherlands.

In other geographies, Takeda is deepening its commitment in specialty care while maintaining its strategic presence in primary care. To what extent is this strategy replicated in the Netherlands?

First of all, Takeda's revenues in the Netherlands have been growing faster than the market in 2015, which is particularly encouraging and highlights the pertinence of our current strategy. From a top-line perspective, it is true that primary care and notably acid-related diseases still represent the bigger part of our portfolio, but specialty care is rapidly gaining importance. In the future, our growth will indeed come from oncology and irritable bowel disease (IBD) treatments. At this moment, the oncology business is still relatively small because we only have Adcetris on the market. Nevertheless, our new product launches will make a tremendous difference. We have ENTYVIO, which today represents two third of the growth of the total sales in the country. Moving forward, we will focus on two main growth drivers: IBD and oncology. We are trying to find innovative ways to grow the business, for example through better understanding the patient journey and the different needs along this journey. Gaining insights into patients' needs is crucial for us to provide better and more innovative ways of service and support.

How exactly are you working to achieve a better understanding of patients' needs?

We collaborate a lot with patient organizations, which has proven to be an extremely important part of our strategy in this regard. For instance, for a long time, healthcare experts were convinced that IBD patients were interested in knowing the medical details of their disease. However, we discovered that these patients are actually more interested in connecting with other IBD patients for instance, or gaining a better understanding of the disease life cycle. These insights are concrete examples of the kind of knowledge we gather as a result of closely collaborating with patient's organizations. This expertise can now foster our innovation-driven culture and operate as a launching pad to allocate our resources more effectively to ultimately serve patients in a better way.

Christophe Weber, CEO of Takeda, recently laid out his ambitions to make the company a global leader in oncology. In this particularly competitive TA, what will be your main differentiator?

As a Japanese company, our business culture and the way we are trying to be as close to the patient as possible really makes a difference. In general, pharmaceutical companies are still not innovative enough to answer the real questions and real needs of both patients and doctors. The key is to truly understand your patients and doctors in order to provide better answers, better services, and better treatments. An example of this is a 24/7-chat service we are currently developing to catch up with the increasing digitalization of healthcare and the growing need for instant answers.

In this vein, agility has also become an important part of our strategy, and we strive to quicker address the needs and the requirements of our partners. As a matter of fact, the pharmaceutical industry still lags behind many other sectors regarding its ability to be responsive to customers' concerns. There are too many pharmaceutical companies that still conduct business in an old-fashioned way, while customers' expectations have evolved. This is an area where we envision a lot of business opportunities and where we want to make a difference, and I strongly believe that it can become a real differentiator. The world is changing so rapidly, as are customer expectations, that pharmaceutical companies need to adapt their strategies accordingly.

What do you identify as the main challenges and opportunities in the Dutch environment?

We have to find innovative ways to create an affordable system for the patients. However, we also have to ensure that we can give access to innovative products. The challenge is to find a balance between these two priorities. Nevertheless, I believe we can find such a balance if all stakeholders in the industry work together: the pharmaceutical companies, the doctors, the hospitals, the insurance companies and the Minister of Health. We all need to gather at the same table to find sustainable ways to finance the future of healthcare.

Many of your counterparts have been quite pessimistic about market access and the current reimbursement framework in the Netherlands. What is your assessment of the situation?

With the shift of financial resources to hospital budgets, efficiency in product selection has become more important. Hospitals are now more important stakeholders for us than they were in the past. Having overcome the challenge of market access, the second task then is partnering with the hospitals to find a way to include your products in their budgets – as in-patient treatments are now part of hospital budgets. Every hospital has its unique context, and we now evolve at a smaller strategic level by precisely analyzing the concrete situation of all our partners, hospital by hospital.

In this regard, the role of our market access department has evolved from a support structure to a true strategic asset – gathering a very precise understanding of the current concerns and needs of all hospitals present on our territory.

Where do you want to lead Takeda over the next five years?

I want Takeda to be a trusted and reliable partner in the healthcare system. Some stakeholders still only perceive us only as a drug developer, but we are extremely determined to play a much more important role in the future. If we truly understand patients' needs and are able to evolve as an organization to instantly answer the requests from doctors and patients, we can indeed be more involved in the treatment of the patient. And this is exactly where we want to be!

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