

Interview: Giovanni Battista Gervasi - Senior Research Manager, Laboratori Baldacci SpA, Italy



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Family-owned Laboratori Baldacci is something of a rare breed in an industry dominated by multinational players. The senior research manager discusses the history of the company as well as how it plans to leverage its portfolio of innovative products and internationalization to drive growth in future.

Could you please provide our readers with some background information about the company?

Founded in Pisa on March 31, 1904, today Laboratori Baldacci SpA is one of the oldest family-owned pharmaceutical companies in Italy. Whereas at the end of the 18th and 19th century in Italy, as well as in France, most drug manufacturers originated from “pharmacies”, elsewhere the development of the pharmaceutical industry started with the industry of chemical colorants. A good example of a medicine originating from these kinds of chemicals is sulphonamide drugs.

After World War II the area around Pisa was an important pharmaceutical cluster, hosting around 20 companies. Over time many of these were acquired by large multinational pharmaceutical groups, whereas Laboratori Baldacci did not undergo this fate. This was also thanks to the brilliant intuition of Dr Valentino Baldacci, the grandfather of today’s CEO, Dr Massimo Baldacci, who

transformed a pharmacy into a drug manufacturer, first by specializing in the development of vitamins and later by focusing on the development of original pharmaceutical products, also thanks to the collaboration with the renowned researchers of the University of Pisa.

The Latin saying “primum non nocere, deinde curare” was —and still is— the pillar which has driven the research of Laboratori Baldacci over all this time.

What kind of products has the company focused on over these years?

The direction of the company consolidated after World War II and led to the development of several new products, such as Normogin, for instance, a pharmaceutical product made with lactobacillus, still important today in terms of sales and scientific relevance. Over the last 30 years we have studied a number of active principles, derivatives of heparan sulfate and drugs active against hepatitis B among others.

Currently the company relies on a large number of patents in Europe as well as in the US, because it decided to study products already distributed in Italy to explore new therapeutic indications. R&D led to interesting results, as was the case of Capillarema, a drug based on aminoptone, which is active at capillary level and has therapeutic properties for Raynaud’s disease. A further interesting product developed by Laboratori Baldacci is Metadoxil, based on metadoxine, a drug against the damages caused by alcohol, sold today in Italy as well as in different East European and Asian countries. In the US we recently obtained a patent for this product because the drug showed to also be active against hepatic fibrosis, moving clinical research projects towards non-alcohol related hepatic pathologies such as Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) and Nonalcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH).

Recently the company developed and launched Balfolic, a product made with folic acid with a dosage of 0.4mg per tablet for women to prevent congenital malformations in babies (such as spina bifida and anencephaly), in an innovative presentation of 120 tablets, ideal to prevent such malformations.

What are some of the most recent developments of the company?

In 2015 Laboratori Baldacci filed four patent requests for products with a combined antibacterial and antiviral activity, which can be used against a wide spectrum of bacteria and virus, including labial herpes. Pirometaxina[®], the innovative product for which the company is filing the patent, is based on the original combination of two different active principles and ensures a 10-times exponential increase of the antibacterial/antiviral activity.

It is used in different products for topical use, of great interest for Laboratori Baldacci. For the future the company has two interesting perspectives: on the one hand to continue researching original products and discover new activity both from a pharmacological and clinical point of view; on the other to foster the distribution of products abroad.

Why did the company decide to expand to other countries?

Approximately 50 years ago Laboratori Baldacci expanded to Spain and, afterwards, to Portugal, where the company is still present. After that, the company stretched to Brazil, where today some original Laboratori Baldacci drugs as well as other products of the cardiovascular area are produced. In Portugal the company also distributes cosmetic products and supplements, also exported to Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa.

The propeller center remains Pisa but the network of collaboration among the different subsidiaries of the group is very strong. For several years Laboratori Baldacci has marketed Metadoxil, our drug against alcoholism produced at Laboratori Baldacci in Pisa

What is the company's most interesting new product?

It is surely Tecnofer, an iron salt, which does not split within the stomach but is absorbed at duodenal level. This characteristic avoids side effects of other iron salts taken orally and increases the plasmatic bioavailability of the product, ensuring an improved therapeutic impact.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of being a family-owned company in an industry dominated by multinational companies?

I believe it's an advantage because the firm focuses on the development of innovative products. Over the years we have developed products and skills which ensure the company occupies a specific space in the national and international markets and allows its employees to develop a strong sense of belonging.

What are the plans for the future?

In Italy Laboratori Baldacci enjoys a good name and over time it has developed an excellent trust relationship with doctors as well as with patients. The next step for Laboratori Baldacci will definitely be internationalization: we believe our original and patented products have all the characteristics to reach this goal.

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