

Interview: Charles-Henri Bodin - General Manager, Pierre Fabre Pharma, Italy



Have trust in the Italian people. They are very creative at problem-solving, much more so than Northern Europeans.

27.05.2016

Tags: [Pharma](#), [Pharmaceuticals](#), [Italy](#), [Pierre Fabre](#), [Pfizer](#), [Toviaz](#), [Partnership](#), [Charles-Henri Bodin](#), [Interview](#), [Insight](#), [Exclusive](#), [Executive](#), [Italy](#),

Charles-Henri Bodin, General Manager of Pierre Fabre, explains how the recent agreement with Pfizer on Toviaz will enlarge their footprint in Italy and how partnerships will play an increasing role in future growth.

You've been with PF since 1999, serving in various positions in France and Italy before becoming GM of the Italian affiliate in 2015. What were your key priorities when you took this position a year ago?

As general manager my key priority is to make the Pierre Fabre business grow in the Italian market. As our product portfolio is at a mature stage, we have primarily focused our efforts on improving the productivity and efficiency of our sales force unit. Our headquarters in France rolled out this initiative in 2013 to all European affiliates with the aim to define concrete sales force effectiveness guidelines.

[related_story]

Since then, all Pierre Fabre subsidiaries are trying to work in sync in terms of applying certain principles when it comes to product prioritization, targeting specific doctors, standardizing the way we communicate the benefits of our products and more. Indeed, we are organizing trainings for our representatives to equip them with all necessary information and scientific background in order for

them to follow these principles. With this restructuring we are aiming to become a more flexible and performing organization.

In addition to successfully implementing these sales-force effectiveness guidelines my other main priorities include the identification of local opportunities for our products in Italy as well as managing and implementing the product launches that come from the headquarter level.

Recently Pierre Fabre signed a promotional agreement with Pfizer in Europe for its specialties Toviaz. Toviaz is a drug prescribed in urology and gynecology in the treatment of the symptoms that may occur in adult patients with overactive bladder syndrome. When will the promotion of this product begin in Italy?

The Toviaz agreement is the first agreement that will bring a new product to the Italian affiliate, resulting from the "Trajectoire 2018 initiative". The idea behind this strategic plan, "Trajectoire 2018" is for our pharma business to reorganize our R&D and identify new business development opportunities, both internal and external to grow our product portfolio. In this regard we have also established a partnership with the American biopharmaceutical company Array BioPharma to globally develop and commercialize Array's late-stage novel oncology products, binimetinib and encorafenib. Binimetinib, a MEK inhibitor, and encorafenib, a BRAF inhibitor, are currently advancing in two, global Phase 3 trials for melanoma.

For Pierre Fabre, Toviaz is the perfect deal because the product is in complete synergy with our portfolio in urology and gynecology. In fact, in many of our subsidiaries we are developing and deepening our expertise in urology and gynecology with two of our main historical products, Permixon and Tardyfer, as well as we are adding new products to our portfolio through in-licensing.

In addition, Toviaz is a very interesting product because it comes from the last generation of antimuscarinics. We have come to an agreement with Pfizer due to the fact that Pfizer has revised its priorities in terms of promotional investments in Europe. Clinical studies have demonstrated the efficiency and tolerability of Toviaz; it is a great drug and complements our portfolio very well.

What is the importance of the Italian affiliate to the Pierre Fabre group?

Pierre Fabre has two different business lines: dermo-cosmetic and pharmaceuticals. Overall, Italy is a very important country for Pierre Fabre. The dermo-cosmetic business in Italy is the number one business worldwide in terms of turnover. The pharma business in Italy is the second most important one after Spain, generating revenues worth EUR 35 million. In Italy, oncology contributes EUR 15 million in turnover; urology and gynecology contribute EUR 20 million.

How do you navigate the regulatory environment in Italy?

[Featured_in]

The regulatory environment is quite complex and burdensome, which is an issue for Italy in terms of attractiveness and makes my job as a general manager challenging to justify certain strategies to our headquarters in France. However, we have seen some improvements in the recent past, on an economic level but also in the pharma industry in particular. Market access is still an issue but lead times for market access have slowly been decreasing. Having said that, I find it more interesting to work in a country with a complex regulatory environment because, for me, facing constraints means that the industry is developed.

The Pierre Fabre Group recently announced the Fund for Innovation, a new Open Innovation initiative targeting biotech companies, start-ups and research laboratories specialized in oncology or dermatology. How does this initiative play out in Italy?

The idea of Pierre Fabre is to support biotech, start-ups and research centers in many ways by bringing our R&D expertise to these institutions, by funding projects, and by providing capital to small biotech companies in order for them to develop their drugs. This effort particularly focuses on companies that are in pre-clinical early clinical stages in the area of oncology, dermatology and onco-dermatology.

Pierre Fabre has decided to roll out this initiative mainly in Europe. France and Italy are the main markets for this project, as we have many innovative centers and dynamic universities. In September/October, we are going to promote this Fund of Innovation in Italy together with the Pierre Fabre head of R&D.

Pierre Fabre is the second largest private pharmaceutical group in France but has had some challenges on the R&D front over the last few years. To address this, PF has developed partnership strategies based on co-marketing and promotion deals, i.e. with Recordati in cardiology, Menarini for respiratory diseases, Roche and Novartis for Oncology, Pfizer for Urology and more. What role will partnerships play for future growth?

Partnerships are a key element for Pierre Fabre Pharmaceuticals. As we are currently reorganizing our own R&D department and lead times for market access are still considerably long, we are expecting our own new products to come to market in the early 2020. As a result, our focus is on identifying external opportunities, such as the Toviaz and Array agreement, to develop our

business.

What is your vision for the Pierre Fabre Italian affiliate until 2020?

I have just assumed my position in 2015. Naturally, I want to grow my affiliate, identify and certainly seize new business development opportunities. For me personally, the most important thing is to learn and grow this business in a complex Italian market, which is a key market for the group.

What would your advice to incoming general managers of multinational companies be?

Have trust in the Italian people. They are very creative at problem-solving, much more so than Northern Europeans. Moreover, they achieve great results in a short time and know how to deal with crises. If you respect the legal and cultural rules, written and unwritten, and your experience here will be fantastic.

[See more interviews](#)