Interview: Jean-Christophe Barland – Senior Vice President & General Manager France, Bristol-Myers Squibb (BMS)



Bristol-Myers Squibb's transformation can be summarized in the phrase "to build a diversified biopharma company"

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The GM of France for Bristol-Myers Squibb (BMS) discusses becoming a "diversified biopharma company", their commitment to remaining a model of excellence for other affiliates, and his personal philosophy of leadership, moulded by two decades of international experience.

You started off your term with a restructuring plan for the French affiliate in 2013. It is always challenging to lay off employees, but what have been the positive effects of streamlining the business in terms of future performance and efficiency?

It is important to understand the broader context and the rationale for the reorganization. It was driven by internal transformation as much as the external healthcare environment. Since 2007, Bristol-Myers Squibb had been involved in a transformation process, moving from a traditional Big Pharma company with involvement in many fields other than medicines including medical nutrition and medical devices, to a diversified biopharma company. Bristol-Myers Squibb was actually the company that first coined this term. This visionary decision necessitated work on all aspects of operations, including its organization, culture, portfolio range and pipeline as well as its geographic presence. This has been a colossal project for Bristol-Myers Squibb globally and was conducted in two chapters.

The first move was to shrink our footprint in terms of both therapeutic areas and geography. As part of this, we decided to sell part of our portfolio in mature products and we also decided against entering the branded generics market. Instead, then-CEO Lamberto Andreotti made the bold decision to bet on science and innovation. To grasp the significance of this decision, one must first understand the context of the industry as it was then. The mainstream thinking was that R&D in the pharmaceutical sector was all about incremental innovation. Hence, it was important for a company to diversify and hedge its bets. On the contrary, Mr. Andreotti bet on a biotech revolution with the emergence of many disruptive technologies. I had the privilege of joining Bristol-Myers Squibb on the cusp of this revolutionary change.

A prime example is our drug Yervoy, which is the first immuno-oncology drug in France. Even our chosen field, immuno-oncology was very radical, as immuno-oncology was a very fringe field back then and we were seen as eccentrics. Without a doubt, however, this scientific bet has paid off and Bristol-Myers Squibb is very proud of its current visionary strategy. The second move has started fairly recently with the divestment of our diabetes portfolio in order to focus on immuno-oncology and our portfolio of specialty medicines. This change is best reflected in our high level of investment in R&D—more than $4 billion in 2015.

Given this major strategic overhaul, what is Bristol-Myers Squibb's strategy now and how is this reflected in the French affiliate?

Bristol-Myers Squibb's transformation, initiated by Lamberto Andreotti and continued by the new CEO, Giovanni Caforio, can be summarized in the phrase "to build a diversified biopharma company". It is a two-pronged approach: we are moving into biopharmaceuticals, but we do not want to be known only as a company within a single therapeutic area. We want to build a diversified operation with a track record of excellence in each chosen field of specialty care. This requires a complex balance in terms of resources and investment allocation, but I am confident we will manage it, on both the global and the domestic level.

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As part of our restructuring process, we also took the very bold decision of restructuring our geographical operations, in the process, eliminating the European region as a division. Now, Bristol-Myers Squibb is structured globally in terms of market attractiveness, which are grouped into clusters not necessarily based on geography. We have four large markets directly attached to the global HQ: US, Japan, Germany, and France. Then there is a cluster called EMAC, with the rest of the countries in Europe, and some markets in the Middle East, Australia and Canada, and finally the

so-called “Intercontinental” cluster

We had to decide where France should be positioned in terms of market potential and ultimately we deemed the market significant enough to merit it standing alone. This was in large part due to the brilliant quality of the French healthcare and pharma sectors, with its unparalleled research infrastructure and ecosystem of innovation. This decision was also influenced by France’s critical mass, innovation and market size. Historically, France has been the second biggest market for Bristol-Myers Squibb, overtaken recently by Japan. This restructuring has left us with a chain of command that is short and direct, which is designed to give Bristol-Myers Squibb the agility and flexibility best suited for the successful pursuit of its ambitions.

What is the current global positioning of the French affiliate?

At Bristol-Myers Squibb France, we are well-positioned to be a model for other affiliates in a number of respects. In the clinical research domain, we benefit from an ecosystem of innovation, reflected not only in the Prix Galien we have won twice in the US in the prestigious category of “Best Biotechnology Product”, both in 2012 and in October 2015, but also the statistics surrounding our clinical research presence in France. Looking at oncology, we are the second largest laboratory in terms of the number of patients enrolled in clinical trials. I want to position Bristol-Myers Squibb France as a specific contributor, as ‘a center of excellence’ to Bristol-Myers Squibb’s new corporate strategy, not just in research and science but also in other aspects of our operations, and to drive changes and improvements that are saleable to global operations.

An area in which we have invested in is customer experience. We are very proud that Bristol-Myers Squibb France won the prize for ‘Best Relationship Intelligence’ from the French Association of Customer Relationships. We are the first pharma company to have received this recognition. We are keen to export our expertise to other affiliates and we have begun to lead the way in customer experience. Notably, the current customer relations manager for our global operations used to be the head of customer relations at Bristol-Myers Squibb France. The next step we’ve undertaken is to develop open collaborative innovation.

As the general manager of the French affiliate, I am very proud to represent France. In spite of the negativity surrounding France, there remain a lot of strengths, including but not limited to the ATU system (early-access to drugs not yet on the market), quality of science, quality of healthcare. Bristol-Myers Squibb is extremely proud to be in France, as it is a fantastic environment.

Mr. Patrick Errard from Astellas had an interesting view on R&D: he said the ‘R’ in R&D is based in certain geographies, which concentrates skills, competences and money in a

limited number of locations, while the ‘D’ is global, since all subsidiaries need to be included in terms of adapting the research to specific markets. What is Bristol-Myers Squibb’s perspective on this?

This is a very interesting perspective. At Bristol-Myers Squibb however, we would point out that under the R component, there is another D, which stands for discovery. Bristol-Myers Squibb is very proud of its science and its innovation, investing more than $4 billion in R&D in 2015, but we remain very humble. What the current biotech environment is impressing on us is that good science and technology can come from anywhere and everywhere, be it start-ups, bigger entities, from Europe, Asia or other regions in the world.

Our job is not only to focus on in-house innovation but to be very agile and alert, particularly in spotting attractive potential and opportunities, and subsequently offering attractive partnerships with external organizations. This is particularly important in a field like immuno-oncology, which is very much still in its infancy. Therefore, research in this context is not limited to our internal brick-and-mortar facilities, but also a global search effort.

Amidst concerns about declining competitiveness in the French clinical research sector, Bristol-Myers Squibb remains a major investor in French R&D. Can you tell us more as to why Bristol-Myers Squibb values France so highly in this area?

One of the most attractive elements in France is the undeniable quality of the teams and the scientific research environment. Several of the top oncology institutions in the world are found in France, which makes it important for us to work with them very closely.

An important key performance indicator (KPI) in clinical research is the attrition rate between phase I and II studies, and Bristol-Myers Squibb France is the top performer on this metric. Bristol-Myers Squibb is the top recruiter of patients in France for melanoma. However, Bristol-Myers Squibb is absolutely not playing this game in terms of ‘size’. Size is important to the extent that a critical mass is required for efficiency and true progress, but we are not chasing blindly after size and expansion. We are very proud of achieving the flexibility and agility that we have. We value excellence more than size, so while we are not aiming to be the top oncology company, we do want to be the leader in our chosen field of immuno-oncology, and eventually immuno-sciences in a larger sense.

Bristol-Myers Squibb chose France to create the first “Corporate Foundation for Research in Immuno-Oncology”, funded with an initial endowment of €7.5 million and aimed at supporting public and private research projects in four areas: fundamental as well as clinical & translational

research, but also care pathways and a special focus on onco-paediatrics. The inception of this Foundation is a testimony to the excellence of the French medical and scientific environment and our societal commitment.

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We have heard from many pharmaceutical companies that market access is a very difficult issue in France, despite the famous ATU system. Given that Bristol-Myers Squibb has one of the most interesting drug pipelines of any global biopharma company, having delivered 12 new medicines to patients in the last 7 years, how have you fared with this issue in France?

In terms of Bristol-Myers Squibb's corporate priority, maximizing the speed of patient access to innovative drugs is absolutely essential. France's ATU system is undeniably and unequivocally a brilliant one. It is a win for the patients, it is a win for the medical community and it is a win for society: it provides the opportunities to treat patients efficiently. Looking at the number of patients that have been treated in France through this mechanism, France is globally the first in early-access programs.

Speaking specifically about breakthrough drugs in oncology, speed is crucial and literally a matter of life-and-death for patients. A couple of weeks or even a couple of days could be too late. Personally, it excites me to know that, for instance, when I am in Chicago attending a conference on the newest developments in cancer in the middle of the week, I know that by the time I return to France on Monday, French patients will be able to access the life-saving drugs.

Does the ATU system make up for the difficulties related to market access? Depends on the definition of market access. In the most conventional sense, market access refers to pricing and reimbursement. But if you define market access more broadly in terms of access to patients, then, yes, because patients are not actually penalized for the administrative delays. The ATU system is unparalleled, we need to be very proud of this and all healthcare stakeholders need to work together to preserve it.

Christian Lajoux, president of FEFIS (French Federation of Health Industries) has expressed significant concern over the future of the French manufacturing industry. Bristol-Myers Squibb has a major manufacturing site in Agen, France, which accounts for 50 percent of Bristol-Myers Squibb volumes globally. To what extent does this center act as a model for other manufacturing centers?

The UPSA factory in Agen in Lot-et-Garonne is the first manufacturing site for Bristol-Myers Squibb outside of the US in terms of volume in units produced. It is a center of excellence in which we have invested heavily and will continue to do so. Bristol-Myers Squibb is also very important for the local economy, as we are the first employer of the Lot-et-Garonne region and the second private employer in the broader Aquitaine region.

Admittedly, UPSA has faced quite some challenges over the recent years, but we've started to reap the fruit of the strategy put into place more than one year ago and recently reinforced. Agen's main production is paracetamol, which is susceptible by nature to the two threats of price cuts and generics competition. These are a significant matter of concern and we are trying to mitigate the risks through different initiatives in order to maximize the use of this facility, for instance by evolving our production capabilities and introducing OTC production, but also by reinforcing our export capabilities. UPSA generates more than 50% of its revenues outside of France.

You have spent over 20 years living outside France and have worked in a variety of countries, including Germany, the UK and Singapore. How has your international exposure helped you in your current position?

My international exposure and experience have made me the leader I am today. I firmly believe that while there are many ways to be successful, the crucial fact is that success is not just what you bring personally to your company but also what the environment provides and how you interact with your environment. You can be successful anywhere, regardless of your passport, but it requires a good analysis of the assets you possess and can bring to the equation, and making the hard choices sometimes required to transform your strengths into real outcomes. Working in a foreign environment really forces you to evaluate your skill set and leadership potential. You need to think about what you can personally bring to the company to help your employees become more successful, given the various challenges of gaps in terms of language, culture, among others. There is a lot of self-exploration involved. This is a challenge.

What would be your final message to our audience?

Don't rely on the clichés about France! Come and visit for yourself – I guarantee you will be pleasantly surprised.

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