Interview: Tamas Uri – Country Manager, Mylan Hungary



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Mylan Hungary's Tamas Uri discusses transitioning into both a branded and generic business dedicated company, Mylan's expansion in Hungary, and how the pharmaceutical industry can be a key player in improving the extremely low health literacy rates in the country.

As an introduction to our readers could you please provide some insight into your rather non-traditional background and describe a few of the factors that ultimately lead you to Mylan and any difficulties you encountered during your transition?

I am an economist by education, having finished my studies in Poland in 1999. Eventually I began working in medical instruments, was CEO of GEERS from 2005-2012, after which I joined MSD. For four years I was responsible for diverse therapeutic areas and as a Business Unit Director I gained valuable insights into the innovative industry. One major observation was that the Hungarian market is very price-sensitive due to constraints on reimbursements. I was therefore very interested in being able to learn more about the generic side of the market in an organization offering the full overview of both a branded and a generic portfolio. That is what prompted me to take this offer with Mylan a few months ago.

I must admit, it is quite a challenging process. On the one hand, the Hungarian pharmaceutical market is heavily regulated, both by the government and external laws, and on the other hand our company’s internal regulations are of very high standards and require full dedication and deep commitment.

How did you react upon receiving the offer to take over the helm here at Mylan, and how did you prepare?

I was thrilled to receive the offer from Mylan. This new role of country manager is an amazing opportunity for me to actively take part with the Hungarian team in the company's mission to provide seven billion people access to high quality medicine. As far as preparation, I do not have any playbook for success, I simply tried to absorb as much information as possible about Mylan. This company is a learning organization and one where every single collaborator places himself in the position of both the teacher and the student. So since my first day, I have been sharing and learning at the same time.

You have been leading Mylan for a little under two months now. What items have been your top priorities over that time?

My main objective has been to get as comfortably acquainted with Mylan as possible, to have a deep-dive into the portfolio and resources. Additionally, I will continue to work to better understand the dynamics of the company. It is a different approach we have at Mylan compared to focused innovative therapies, as we are working to expand access to more therapies to the people of Hungary.

Could you share with us a few of the main insights into Mylan and its footprint here in Hungary that you have had?

Though Mylan is one the world's leading global pharmaceutical companies, in Hungary, the company awareness is still to be improved at doctor and pharmacist level. However, this should be changed rapidly as Mylan's footprint in this country is important with a packaging facility that employs more than 400 people, combined with a very strong European business service center and a commercial division, gathering together 500 employees. So my first impression was that Mylan is much larger than I had considered it to be. This is even truer since the acquisition of Abbott in 2015. Overall, this is a very fast growing and dynamic company. We have tripled our sales since 2013 and are keen to continue growing in the years to come.

Your CEO, Heather Bresch, has made significant efforts to differentiate Mylan from its competitors through R&D, manufacturing, and M&A. In Hungary, where have your efforts been focused?

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My objective is to grow the company in the Hungarian market, to ensure greater access to our drugs for the Hungarian patients, and be a reliable partner to every stakeholder in the market, including doctors, hospitals, pharmacists, patients associations and the Hungarian state. We are working diligently to develop our presence in all key therapeutic areas, among which Cardiometabolic and CNS portfolio.

You have discussed the topic of generic versus innovative medicines, and you have had experience with both. In terms of doctors and regulators, how do they perceive generics, and the value they provide Hungarian patients?

For me, the right approach is not to oppose innovative medicines versus generics as I believe there is a symbiosis between the two. This symbiosis allows innovators to utilize their patent, and generics to help expand access in the market. It is crucial to better inform and educate all stakeholders about the benefit of the generic medicines besides the originators using reliable and high level content about the different benefits.

When you look at how the Hungarian authorities price generics, after a patent has expired, the state pushes forward so Hungarian patients have more access at a much cheaper price. In Hungary, strict market access criteria are applied to generic products which together with the blind bidding process control the outflow on the Health Fund side, which can be utilized for other parts of the healthcare system. Additionally, this ensures wider and less expensive access to therapies for Hungarian patients. Each year Mylan, as we are a very dynamic company, tries to introduce a lot of new products into the market. Our willingness is to continue broadening our portfolio with new, interesting molecules that will be beneficial for the Hungarian people.

Speaking more generally about Hungary, we have seen that the health literacy rates are among the lowest of the OECD countries. Have you found this to be true in your experience, do patients here fully understand their treatments and the availability of treatments?

Health literacy is a very challenging problem here in Hungary. The health consciousness level of Hungarians is not at a high level; on one hand they do not take much personal responsibility when it comes to their health, on the other hand the communication between the patient and doctor is not up to the desired level. In part this is due to the fact that we do not have enough doctors in Hungary, resulting in many being overloaded with patients. As a consequence they may not have enough time to dedicate to their patients, even if they wished to. Even these particular examples are merely scratching the surface of this topic, but in general I do believe that Hungarians are

ready to start the journey of improving their health status.

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As you mention, improving health literacy is a very challenging task. What steps need to be taken to begin improving the situation?

Improving health literacy must be a project where all stakeholders are involved. We also have to create a platform where patients can get information about issues as simple as health terminologies and patient rights. The state, industry, healthcare providers, associations, the entire system needs to be involved. We need to find a common platform where we can be continually connected and communicating with the population. Pharmaceutical companies also serve a pivotal role in this because they have the resources, not simply material ones, but also the experience and knowledge from other countries which can be useful in Hungary as well.

How would you describe the culture here at Mylan given your extensive history at a variety of other companies?

There are some similarities between Mylan and the other companies I have worked with of course. However what strikes me more is the company personality: people here are really passionate, working relentlessly to satisfy unmet needs through innovation and access development. This is a fast company with an entrepreneurial mindset. People want to be seen as reliable partners. With many challenges around us we do what’s right and not what is easy. Teamwork has a real meaning here. I would like my collaborators to keep the initiatives in bringing new creative ideas while keeping the high ethical standards our company has built into its mission

This is not your first time leading an organization as country manager. In your experience what have you found to be the most effective ways to empower and motivate the people working for you?

I strongly believe that the quality of the human resource of the company today plays a critical role. Attracting the best collaborators is key for a company. Therefore I think that from an employee’s perspective, giving them the freedom to make their own decisions, and the opportunity to improve their skills is extremely important. Employees are eager to grow, learn and evolve at an incredible speed, especially the younger generations. To motivate, we as a company should give them freedom to do so. Mylan has this entrepreneurial mindset in its DNA, I would like to develop it here even more. I do not want people to be afraid of coming up with their own ideas, nor be afraid of their responsibilities. And most importantly, I want the employees to enjoy coming at work and be

proud of their role within the company’s mission.

Looking forward three years, where do you hope to see Mylan here in Hungary?

In three years I would like to have significantly improved our IMS ranking, be recognized as the healthcare partner of Hungarian healthcare stakeholders and also be an attractive partner for new jobseekers. I want Mylan to be a place where people want to work because they are passionate about the company.

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