Interview: John P. Kennedy – Country Manager, Pfizer Czech Republic



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04.07.2016

Tags: Pharma, Pharmaceuticals, Pfizer, Czech Republic, Differentiation, Pipeline, Management strategy, Growth, Europe, Interview, Insight, Exclusive, Executive, Free

The country manager of Pfizer Czech Republic reviews the advantages of Pfizer's highly differentiated pipeline and points out how it will impact the success of the Czech affiliate in the future. Furthermore, he describes how he plans to position Pfizer as partner to the relevant stakeholders in order to utilize synergies for the benefit of all stakeholders in the country.

After 17 years in Pfizer you have assumed position as general manager for Czech Republic, supervisor for Hungary and Global Innovative Pharma business lead starting March this year – congratulations on these positions! Could you please briefly introduce yourself to our readership?

I have always been interested in science, hence why I chose to study biology and afterwards held numerous position within the area of research and development prior to—and within—Pfizer including quality assurance and regulatory types of work. I moved on into different types of commercial roles including roles in marketing, account management, sales leadership and more. Being here in the Czech Republic is an exciting new chapter for me, which allows me to combine all of my past experiences in this general management role. Every time I have had the chance to work in a different context it was eye-opening for me and provided me with new opportunities from a professional and a personal point of view and it is great for me and my family in the Czech Republic!

You’re currently at 5.4 percent market share – third in the Czech Republic after Novartis and Sanofi. What is your strategy to take your place on the throne as number one?

Our core essence is bringing new medicine and innovative treatments to all of the markets we’re active in; we will continue to do so, especially in the Czech Republic. I am excited to have the potential and opportunity of an excellent pipeline regarding the segments of oncology, vaccines, cardiovascular diseases, rare diseases and inflammation; I am confident that we have a very bright future—both short and long term!

Another personal interest of mine is to accelerate the process of positioning us as strategic thought partner for the relevant stakeholders in the Czech Republic. I am confident that this will significantly benefit patients, the country and our operations in general. In the course of our business, for instance, we have significant insights into customers’ needs, diseases and potential to engage in analytics which will identify opportunities to enhance clinical and economic outcomes. We hope to bring these capabilities to the market alongside our value-added treatments.

Pfizer has recently significantly invested in the Czech Republic and established a Global Financial Solution Centre here. Could you please outline Pfizer’s commitment to the Czech Republic?

First and foremost, as aforementioned, we bring several benefits to the market. We bring not only the significant number of innovative medicines—currently around 90 prescription drugs and seven non-prescription drugs—, we employ approximately 250 colleagues here, but we also make remarkable investments. The Pfizer Global Financial Solution centre for various European countries was established in 2014 with USD eight million in investments. Our economic impact is quite significant and the financial shared centre is not the only part of the significant investments we have made here. We have continuously made significant investments into clinical trials over recent years. All of these capital investments highlight our commitment to the Czech patients and Czech market alike.

Pfizer enrols approximately 1000 patients in clinical trials in the Czech Republic, how would you assess the potential of the Czech Republic to become a clinical trial hub?

In the last couple of years, we have invested CZK 280 million (USD 11.7 million) into clinical trials in the Czech Republic every year, resulting in about 50 clinical trials enrolling more than 1000 patients yearly. I am proud that this isn’t just a one-time story but rather a genuine track record of commitment. If in the future additional opportunities arise to enhance these investments, we’re most certainly open for discussion.

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In a nutshell: just how significant is the Czech Republic to your global and regional operations?

Every market we operate in is meaningful to Pfizer's global operations. In the Czech Republic, we have a meaningful population and a functioning healthcare system in which patients have access to innovative medicines and are satisfied with the quality of its outcome. On top of that, there are favourable economic indicators which strongly suggest significant potential for investment. Undoubtedly there are challenges as well; the most significant being the pan-European challenge of the aging population from which the Czech Republic isn't spared. The implication of the latter raises the question of cost control while keeping the ability to invest in innovation. I am looking forward to being part of conversations surrounding these issues, and contributing to efforts to find solutions to these challenges. Certainly, we will continue to invest in innovation and we have strong track record in doing just that.

I saw that on a global scale your bestselling products are the Prevnar family, however, in the Czech Republic it is Enbrel. Could you please talk us through your main therapeutic areas and best-selling products?

One of many elements within our operational strategy is to maintain an internal structure which allows us to focus on several different therapeutic areas; we've always done that and we will continuously focus and evolve this structure. Enbrel, the rheumatoid arthritis drug, is a well appreciated biotechnology product with more than 15 years of market experience in Europe and we are pleased that physicians recognise its benefits for patients. Regarding vaccination, I think there is still room for government to promote the clear benefit of prevention – the vaccination rates in the Czech Republic lag behind many of its peer markets.

The Czech market has a unique dual reference system leading to some of the lowest drug prices in Europe. How do you navigate Pfizer Czech Republic through the price pressure ultimately for the benefit of the patient?

This process starts upstream for us and is multidimensional. First of all, I would like to highlight that our portfolio provides advantages for navigating around price pressure, due to its high level of differentiation. What's more, we are able to produce the relevant data surrounding our products which showcase this differentiation and its added value from a medical and economical perspective; the latter value is recognized and appreciated by the relevant authorities. Beyond that, as we discussed earlier, our goal is to be a strategic thought partner in the market. If this

requires that we explore certain agreements on risk sharing models, then we're certainly open to discussion. Everything we do is tailored towards providing access to high quality medicine to patients in a way that doesn't undermine innovation for the future. Thus far we have struck that balance and I'm confident that we will continue to do so.

Given the current regulatory framework in the Czech Republic, do you think the benefits and added value of innovative treatments are appreciated by regulatory authorities here?

I'm certain that there's the potential for that, so the answer is yes. Pathways for pricing and reimbursement are existing and we have successfully brought our portfolio to the market. Obviously there are certain areas where we need to improve our in-depth understanding of specific procedures and how these are applied. For instance, in the reimbursement procedures the innovative treatment can be placed within the same reference group as a treatment with lost exclusivity.

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Where do Pfizer's operations impact the life of patients the most?

The treatments as such are significantly impactful—for each and every patient to be determined individually. We're interested in the discovery of new treatments, in bringing these to the market and translating the gathered knowledge into practice. The latter being a significant part of our efforts. A large part of what our colleagues here do is to ensure that the science and knowledge which was accumulated in the development process is in the hands of medical practitioners—to ensure that they can utilize the treatment to its fullest, for the benefit of their patients.

How has your leadership style changed since coming to the Czech Republic?

For me personally, that is an ongoing journey. To be honest, I'm still learning about the culture, being part of the culture is what I believe is most significant towards understanding the market needs, the different players and being responsive; this is a universal approach and I will emphasize this here in the Czech Republic.

My leadership style is also influenced by some personal experiences. Last year, for instance, I completed a full distance Iron Man Triathlon; there was a time where I thought that this would be impossible, nonetheless, I ultimately mastered this challenge. I have some lessons from that experience, one of which being that nothing is completely impossible though requires focus and giving oneself permission to aspire. As team, we're working on establishing this thought culture in

order to identify what we can actually achieve.

Where do you want to lead Pfizer’s operations in the next five years?

The answer goes back to what I have said about our pipeline, objectives, and goals. If I am to look back in five years’ time I would be very proud to have accomplished providing patients with the most innovative treatments! Furthermore, I want to continue to evolve our “how-to” approach with our customers; as a process I perceive this as constant evolution. I would like to see all governmental, regulatory and other stakeholders perceiving and respecting Pfizer Czech Republic as a thought partner in patient care, and one engaged in a dialogue about how to deliver quality treatments in a transparent and predictable environment.

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