

Interview: Andrea Bondar - Country Manager, LEO Pharma Hungary



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Pharma Hungary's Andrea Bondár demonstrates the significance of adopting non-traditional methods of promotional activities, and defines how a true intent on understanding the psyche of patients suffering from chronic skin conditions can lead to much more productive working relationships between doctors, pharma companies, and the patients themselves.

Can you please provide an overview of LEO Pharma's presence in Hungary, and also describe what direction you plan on taking the affiliate as Country Manager?

The LEO Pharma Hungarian affiliate was founded in 2010, and the psoriasis products are in the first line regarding our sold products. In 2010 we had a sales team, marketing team and general management. We carried then traditional promotional activities by personally visiting the doctors, showing them newest clinical data results, and explaining the advantages of our products compared with the competitors.

One of the issues that we faced was the general problem that the patients are not really compliant in adhering to their treatment regiments and don't use the medications in a proper way. In addition, both patients and doctors expressed a lot of frustration, therefore we needed to know what patients really need and how can we help them.

Actually, the main question was not about what kind of medications patients used, but what kind of everyday problems they faced—ultimately determining whether psoriasis was really a skin disease with psychological symptoms or a psychological disorder with skin symptoms.

An explorative process was initiated with the following outcome:

- Qualitative and quantitative patient insight research as basis for future provision of patient value
- Adding to that, we adopted new innovative promotional channels with the aim of reaching more patients.

In the end, we concluded that if we only focused on treating skin disease symptoms without knowing the patients' everyday problems, our efforts probably wouldn't be successful in the long run.

What methods did you apply for creating stronger relationships with the doctors?

Following our research we soon realized that the dermatologists are mainly focusing on treating skin diseases. They have no time and capacity to adequately recognize and address the corresponding psychological burdens of patients with psoriasis.

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Therefore we decided to focus not only on the patients, but also to organize research among the doctors. We needed to know how we can offer the needed support to the dermatologists, not by only rendering new publications and data, but by establishing a much more cooperative relationship with them.

We collected a lot of information about the dermatologists' mindsets and their burdens in connection to their professional life. In one surprising case, the doctor was so busy and unsatisfied with her current working conditions that she simply wasn't capable of empathizing with the patients anymore. Many doctors have also said that they weren't properly equipped to effectively handle the frustration of the patients.

So we decided to build channels with the doctors to educate them about how to communicate with the patients, while offering those experts who could help the patients overcome their burdens in relation to their skin diseases.

As such, we created an online portal for doctors called dermacare.hu to help them acquire the necessary support. The primary objectives of this portal were to build a partnership and help

healthcare practitioners stay up-to-date with the latest scientific advancements, better understand the needs of the patients, and establish open communication channels with other doctors in the community as well as with LEO Pharma.

Our platform is not only online, we have a printed version as well. We collect the most read online articles and publish a DermaCare magazine every six months and distribute it to all dermatologists in Hungary.

To continue their dermatology speciality practice the doctors need to collect credit points. We recently opened a new part on our website where the doctors can register themselves to our online accredited educational courses. The first online course has started on July 2016 is about the time-saving and effective doctor-patient communication.

Does LEO Pharma have such digital channels for patients as well?

Yes, LEO Pharma created a global platform for patients not just in Hungary but in several countries all around the world. [QualityCare](#) is a digital initiative for the patients suffering from skin diseases, whom can register and get information on their diseases and it also delivers practical advice on how to deal with stress and how to handle their everyday problems in connection to their disease.

Hungary was the second country to be covered by the website as a part of our push towards patient centricity, now we have more than 3000 registered readers in the website.

How exactly did this unique initiative come to fruition? And what were some of the challenges of implementing in a market like Hungary?

HQ had originally identified Hungary as an ideal pilot location to launch new projects, and the initial results and feedback we received immediately indicated the value and importance of the intelligence that we've been collecting and the significant role it can potentially play in bringing the entire organization closer to the patients.

And we certainly weren't alone throughout this endeavor. We've constantly been in touch with other international teams that are incorporating various aspects of what has been done in Hungary. Even if the financial prospects here are relatively low, the knowledge that we've been able to obtain has been invaluable for the group.

One of the main difficulties were the local regulations and legal restrictions that effectively brought some of our ideas to a standstill. It is very difficult to comply with all the regulatory requirements, and our lawyers were always providing us with what we can achieve in light of these restrictions.

Our overarching aim has been to help the patients, and we feel that the regulatory authorities are starting to recognize our efforts and the positive outcomes that we've been able to bring Hungarian patients.

Skin diseases are often overlooked, especially compared to more prevalent diseases and oncological illnesses. What is LEO Pharma doing to put a greater spotlight on the awareness and treatment of skin diseases in Hungary?

We are supporting patient support programs in three dermatology clinics in Hungary, where part time nurses work with patients on information delivery about their treatment. The patients visit the nurses three times, and along with nurses there are dietitians, psychologists and physiotherapists, supporting comprehensively on the improvement of patients' conditions.

Based on all of this, LEO Pharma became well known among dermatologists as a company that truly understands the need to sustain cooperative relationships with both doctors and patients.

How have these non-traditional methods translated into commercial performance of the company?

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When we opened the dermacare.hu platform, and we started to communicate on a regular basis, our impact on the traditional commercial metrics (e.g. sales) started to increase again—ultimately validating our new strategic approach. With our professional team in the office, which consists of communication and digital marketing experts and a medical relation manager on the field whose responsibility is to personally introduce all of our initiatives to dermatologists, we are currently performing double-digits in comparison to the previous years.

Have you been able to launch any new products to supplement the implementation of this unique model?

In recent years, we have been very focused on introducing value-adding digital services that complement our already well-established portfolio of topical psoriasis products. Currently, LEO is in the first chapter of the European launch for a new topical treatment and we are working on introducing this to the Hungarian patients also in the future.

To me this is testimony that LEO Pharma has always pursued different solutions that also provided add benefits to the prescribers and patients alike —whether that in terms of new formulations, delivery forms or digital communication.

How will the recent acquisition of Astellas' global dermatology portfolio help bolster the company's ability to help treat Hungarian patients suffering from chronic skin conditions?

Our team now includes five professionals, we are planning to bring on board more colleagues to help with the integration of Astellas' portfolio, furthering demonstration our conviction to helping people with all types of dermatology diseases. In Hungary the Astellas portfolio is well known and accepted by the dermatologists.

However, we still need to have marketing authorization and it takes time, but we expect the Astellas portfolio to increase our sales dramatically. Globally, this deal extends the reach of LEO to patients by close to 50%; we significantly expand our range of solutions for patients with eczema, acne and skin infections, and we will be adding around 20% to our annual turnover.

What qualities do you believe truly distinguish LEO Pharma from any other company operating in the pharmaceutical industry today?

Many other companies might boast the same mindset, but spanning my professional experiences thus far, I truly believe that LEO Pharma is one of the few companies that understands and embodies this notion of putting patients at the center. I'm proud that our values are driven by the passion of our CEO Gitte Aabo, who has done a fantastic job in conveying the company's willingness to help people to achieve healthy skin, while other companies are solely focused on increasing sales numbers.

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