Interview: Radek Korbel – Head of Affiliate, Sanofi-Genzyme Czech Republic & Slovakia

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The Head of Sanofi-Genzyme's Czech & Slovak affiliate points out that his affiliate generates a third of the regional turnover for the group as rules and regulations in his market resemble a paradise in regional comparison. The high commitment to patients is highlighted as a fundamental reason for this success!

Mr. Korbel, could you please briefly introduce yourself and your background to our executive readership around the world?

I have started working for in the Czech affiliate in 2007—back then only Genzyme—shortly after the acquisition by Sanofi I became head of Genzyme (currently) Sanofi-Genzyme in 2012 and have been managing our affiliate for the Czech Republic and Slovakia ever since. When I started heading the affiliate, we consisted of a team of eight people. Over the years we've grown significantly and now employ nearly 30 people; part of those are colleagues from Sanofi Oncology which is run under the Sanofi Genzyme umbrella thus enhancing our expertise in rare diseases and MS by oncology specialists. One of our future focuses is definitely immunology; we're close to registering a highly innovative drug for Rheumatoid Arthritis and within the next two years we expect to launch a transformative treatment for Atopic Dermatitis. All of our treatments are available in special centralized care units across the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Could you please outline the key benefits and synergies the acquisition of Sanofi has brought to your affiliate?

I identify some glistening benefits the acquisition brought to our affiliate in the Czech Republic and Slovakia! We get highly valuable support form Sanofi, for instance in market access as well as extensive supply benefits. Prior to the acquisition we couldn't focus solely on sales operations thus maximizing patient benefits and market penetration as we had to include all other aspects—such as distribution—in our daily operations. The acquisition also brought financial benefits! We've reached a point before the acquisition where due to financial restrictions we were forced to shut down some clinical programs. Due to the strong financial backbone of Sanofi we were able to relaunch these, which ultimately benefits the patients just as much as it benefits our operations in the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

What role does the Czech & Slovak affiliate play in Sanofi-Genzyme's regional network today?

As part of Sanofi-Genzyme's CEE cluster–Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, former Yugoslavia, Greece and Cyprus—we're one of the most significant affiliate as we generate approximately nearly 15 percent in total (30 percent in MS field) of the cluster's total turnover, thus positioning us in a leading position alongside Poland and Greece. Specifically, Poland–although being a huge market—is very difficult for the pharmaceutical industry. Our regional head often jokes that the Czech Republic, in terms of sophistication of rules and regulations, market access, and transparency, is a paradise in comparison with the other countries included in our region.

"The most important part of Sanofi-Genzyme is to innovate and deliver patients with game-changing treatments" **Christian Deleuze – President, Sanofi Genzyme France; – In the Czech Republic however, delivering innovative treatments is often challenged by its dual referencing system which results in some of the lowest prices in Europe. How do you navigate through this price pressure to deliver the most innovative treatments to patients in need?**

From a purely regulatory standpoint, frankly, it is very simple as all our drugs and treatments have centralized registration on the EU level. However, pricing and reimbursement is much more difficult due to the complexity of the Czech system. Actually, it is so complex that when I explain this system to my colleagues from the US, for instance, they will not understand and deem it to be illogical. In MS, we're referenced to other local drugs which gets quite complicated. On the other hand, once you're in the system you'll be listed and reimbursed; once achieved this status quo is

secured as no one will take you off the list. Frankly speaking, part of my job is to highlight the benefits and potential the Czech and Slovak market offers to the rest of the group and persuade them that here one will not experience ‘turbulences’: the political environment is stable, the healthcare system is functioning and all other requirements needed to achieve good sales results are given – it’s all just about the right management of these two markets!

[Featured_in]

In the Czech Republic, you focus on bringing innovative treatments in the area of lysosomal storage diseases as well as MS to Czech patients. As a market, the Czech Republic is quite peculiar due to the centralized care units for rare diseases as well as MS – which will be further enhanced according to the National Plan Health2020 – to what extent are these centres beneficial or challenging to your operations?

If the number of centres is limited, the number of potential clients is limited as well. Therefore, these centres induce some competitive challenges, especially in MS and oncology where competition is fierce and on the rise. On the other hand – and this is more important— it does bring significant benefits to the patients. Physicians in the centres are highly specialized and have superior expertise in the field of rare disease treatments. I assume that there’s a national plan for two years aiming at short-term goals and one on a more strategic level laid out for the next decade, however, centralization of rare disease care units is rarely mentioned as a key for all other European countries. However, we need a cross boarder care plan as, especially in this segment, it will create cost efficiencies for payers on a Pan-European level.

To what extent are you the right partner for these specialized care centres?

Being the partner of choice is always the ambition! In the area of rare diseases, we’re the leading company bringing innovative breakthrough treatments for patients in unmet medical need. For instance, our MS treatment, which is the oral treatment for MS; the option for patients significantly improving the quality of life as the need for self-injections is dismissed entirely. We’re currently successfully challenging local competition, one of the reasons of its success being not only convenience for the patients, but from a pure value based perspective this treatment brings enormous costs savings for the payers.

What can you tell us about MS success in the Czech Republic?

We are very successful! We received reimbursement within a year and found the right people who can work with this product. Part of this success is keeping our “Genzyme culture”, meaning we

needed the right people who can explain the advantages of the product to the patients and I can confidently say that we've achieved that!

What are your goals and ambitions for the future of your Czech affiliate for next 5 years?

To keep our energy, values and culture of our team within the company! Additionally, I'd like to see the enhancement of our portfolio and bring innovative immunology treatments to Czech and Slovak patients!

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How do you raise awareness about rare diseases in the Czech Republic?

Anywhere in the world, educating the population about rare diseases is a challenge. In the Czech Republic as well as in Slovakia we're engaging in various awareness campaigns, one being educational awareness material which was aired in media. Additionally, we position ourselves closely to the physicians so as to support them in disease management'; if a physician only has three patients with a certain disease in the course of his career he will need support and someone who offers expertise and experience. Furthermore, as part of the European registry of rare diseases, we maintain an overview of the development of a certain disease. We keep close contact to patient associations sharing our knowledge, newest developments and working on bringing hope to the patients. This is also part of raising awareness and frankly more significant than advertising our products; cooperation with physicians and the education of stakeholders is one of the most important aspects of our work!

You have worked in the pharmaceutical industry for all your life in different companies including Pfizer & Abbott and now at Sanofi-Genzyme. Having experienced these different companies, what would you say differentiates Sanofi-Genzyme the most?

When I joined Genzyme ten years ago, my colleagues told me that I will never be back to other pharmaceutical companies because Genzyme is not the standard. The patient is at the centre of our operations, we do not offer our treatments to just everyone. Our behaviour is not to push for all patients but find those who fit the specific requirements for the treatment. This is very much appreciated by the physicians as well and it is certainly differentiating us within the pharmaceutical landscape as it is resulting in a unique culture!

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