

Interview: Renata Martinakova - Country Manager, LEO Pharma Czech Republic & Slovakia



The most significant success ... in the past two years was the successful restructuring of our organization across both Czech Republic and Slovakia into one cluster organization.

22.07.2016

Tags: [Pharma](#), [Pharmaceuticals](#), [Czech](#), [Slovakia](#), [Dermatology](#), [Skin](#), [Skincare](#), [Astellas](#), [LEO pharma](#), [Patient centricity](#), [INterview](#), [Insight](#), [Exclusive](#), [Executive](#), [Free](#)

The country manager of LEO Pharma Czech Republic and Slovakia explains how the recent acquisition of Astella's dermatology portfolio will triple the revenue of the affiliate and how LEO always puts patients first

Could you please introduce yourself and the cornerstones of your longstanding career in the pharmaceutical industry?

I have been working in the pharmaceutical industry for almost 20 years now, starting as sales representative at Glaxo Welcome in 1997. During my career, I've held numerous positions within Boehringer Mannheim and Roche Diagnostics before joining Ferring where I stayed for 14 years. Two years ago, I was given the opportunity to become the country manager for LEO Pharma in the Czech Republic and Slovakia which was an exciting and interesting opportunity for me because I wanted to take my career to the next step. LEO Pharma was still in the phase of fully establishing itself in these countries which allowed me to significantly drive the growth of our affiliate here.

What would you identify as your most significant success in the past two years at LEO Pharma?

The most significant success to me personally in the past two years was the successful restructuring of our organization across both Czech Republic and Slovakia into one cluster

organization rather than having two separate entities. I matched both teams and merged these under one sales manager and one patient solution manager. This allowed us to utilize a leaner cost structure and synergies benefiting patients and business development alike.

[For more on Czech-Slovak pharma synergies, click here](#)

LEO Pharma has a unique ownership structure with the LEO Foundation at its head. How does this organizational structure influence your day-to-day business?

It is indeed a unique structure and I'm delighted that I have the possibility to work for LEO Pharma! We are a genuinely unique pharmaceutical company with patients at the heart of every endeavor we engage in. This influences our decision making on a daily basis in a way which makes us one of the most ethical companies in the industry. Our code of conduct is the stern anchor of operating for every single employee within LEO Pharma—rather than focusing on profit margins—because the quality of life of our patients and patient satisfaction is our prime target. Our sales teams' success is measured in the number of patients treated. We are always asking ourselves 'How many people have we helped achieve healthy skin today?'— That's our motivation and purpose.

LEO Pharma recently acquired Astellas' dermatology portfolio and thus the global turnover is expected to rise by 20 percent. How does the acquisition affect your affiliate?

Not considering the Russian and Chinese market, the Czech and Slovak market are likely to be impacted the most by the acquisition of Astellas dermatology portfolio. Whereas turnover for the group is expected to rise by double digit growth, I expect the turnover for my affiliate to triple this year—a huge impact. We had to change our complete process structure in order to utilize on this growth appropriately and all of us here are exciting by the upcoming portfolio!

How well are you established compared to your competitors in the dermatology segment?

Our ambition is to become the preferred dermatology partner for our customers; we can offer a wide portfolio covering the vast majority of the dermatology segment. We want to offer our customers the full range of our portfolio and bring all of our products to the Czech and Slovak market. Our target is to treat one million patients across both markets which is approximately seven percent of the total population!

How close are you to your target of treating one million patients in the Czech Republic and Slovakia?

Taking the newly acquired Astellas portfolio into consideration we're at the vanguard of achieving this goal. I don't expect much growth within the Astellas portfolio, however, they are well established and thus should maintain their share of patients. The focus is to increase the number of patients treated with Leo-products, especially in the psoriasis segment, in order to reach a seven-digit number of patients treated.

[Featured_in]

What is the strategy to increase the number of patients treated with LEO Pharma's products?

Our domestic strategy is called 'Helping Petra' leaning on our global strategy 'Helping Sarah', we will focus on bringing benefits and added value to our patients, targeting our main customers –the dermatologists— with sales force, via sales visits, congresses, exhibitions and much more. Overall a wide nonetheless focused approach to the main customers.

How significant is your affiliate towards LEO Pharma's global network?

We have significant growth potential to tap into which is just one of the reasons why we're important towards LEO Pharma's global operations. If only market size is taken into consideration we're obviously a small market, however, we are a small market which significantly contributes to the global growth measurement as we are still in the process of utilizing all the opportunities offered!

What are some of these opportunities you plan to tap into?

Psoriasis patients are still not treated as they should be treated! The current market is dominated by pure steroid treatments for these patients which is far away from the newest innovation at hand. We recently introduced a new fixed combination with higher efficacy and improved safety bringing added value to the patients. Our target is to grow the patient share rather than pure steroids, which is a rather antiquated method of treating Psoriasis patients.

What are some of the challenges of bringing these products to the market?

Most often it is a question of price. We offer innovative products and innovation has its price—especially compared to pure steroids. Medical professionals in the Czech Republic and Slovakia have limited prescription budgets and are less likely to prescribe our products. We

developed a tool which we use to communicate with the prescribers in order to show the pharma economic benefits brought by our products. Our sales teams have been trained to be consultants rather than sales-personnel, in order to be able to show and proof the benefits in an appropriate manner. We need to educate the prescribers that our products—although more expensive—actually save budget because efficacy, quality and safety is much higher, thus helping the patients much quicker!

[related_story]

Skin diseases often imply a certain social stigma to patients. Your products therefore add a new dimension of improving quality of life. Is this added value recognized and appreciated?

Absolutely, we must not forget that we speak about human beings, and the social stigma surrounding skin diseases is present. As aforementioned, improving the lives of as many patients as we can is the core essence in everything we do, that includes innovation. We can offer new solutions in galvanic form which are much better in terms of quality of life for our patients. In the past, there were ointment's which is very inconvenient for patients so we innovated the application form. Currently we're also developing a new application form for psoriasis patients; we introduced a gel some time ago which already increased the convenience for patients quite significantly and in November this year we will launch a treatment in foam form. This will be the most convenient application form for patients and is additionally of the highest efficacy I have seen so far! This is just one of many examples of how LEO Pharma innovates in order to improve the quality of life for our patients!

You have said that your sales force is trained to be consultants rather than pure sale's personnel; where does the consultancy fit into the selling process?

As mentioned earlier, we evaluate the performance of our sales representatives on the number of patients treated. Obviously there are other performance measurements as well, however, the number of patients treated matters most. The consultancy part means that it is not only about offering information about our products to the medical professionals, but rather educating them about all our indications. Additionally, we have a new training program in place which equips our people to deliver the economical aspect to the medical professionals as well, therefore creating the complete picture of benefits of our products.

“If a company wants to survive and remain strong it has to change” Gitte Abbo, CEO LEO Pharma. How does this quote apply to your operations?

I think this quote applies in our day to day operations! We're a team of 14 people, not a big corporation of 100 employees. Most of my staff is multitasking and in cross functional roles and I am confident that we fully achieved this quote of Gitte; we are flexible to the fullest extent! And quite frankly, we have to be flexible in order to achieve in this flexible external environment because it enables us to find solutions for our patients when needed! Often it's also about covering a gap that a competitor leaves thus harming patients. We are quick in realizing solutions and that is the attitude of all of my employees!

One can see that you have been successful throughout your career. What is your secret to success?

Hard work and passion. Everything I do, I do with passion and I genuinely enjoy my work. We've had a meeting in Copenhagen where an external presenter told us to imagine that we work in our own business rather than working for somebody's else business. I couldn't help but think to myself that I've been doing this my whole career. I believe this attitude is what brought me this success, it also serves as great motivator for all the people surrounding you because they see your passion and your hard work and the example you set. They don't want to be behind and they follow your example. My personal believe is, that leading by example is the right and most effective way to lead!

When we come back in 2020, where will you have led your affiliate and where will you be?

I am confident that we will be much larger because there are numerous development projects ongoing in LEO Pharma which will impact our size globally and locally! Frankly speaking, this is one of the main reasons why I enjoy working for LEO Pharma that much, we keep bringing solutions to patients and as organization are still moving and flexible. My personal aspirations are that I would like to grow further in my career. By 2020 I would like to be in an international role, however, with one condition: I want to stay within LEO Pharma!

[See more interviews](#)