Heike Behn – Marketing & Sales Director, Local Safety Officer, Nordic Pharma Switzerland

My number one responsibility is to develop this second leg for the affiliate, ensuring that we are not solely reliant on gynecology, but have a solid rheumatology business

20.10.2016

Tags: Switzerland, Nordic Pharma, Pharma, Pharmaceuticals, Rheumatology, Gynecology, Market access

Heike Behn, reveals how her number one priority at Nordic Pharma Switzerland, the group's'newest affiliate, is to develop their rheumatology business, building on their gynecology platform; how the speed with which they can approach the customer is a major competitive advantage for the company; and how Switzerland´s approval process, when compared to the European average, is particularly fast.

Nordic Pharma Switzerland was the latest of a long line of European affiliates to open in 2014. What has been your mandate when it comes to growing the Swiss business?

The Nordic Group acquired Cosan, which already had one drug for gynecology on the Swiss market. The product, called Mifegyne, is used for the termination of pregnancy, a somewhat controversial area in our industry. However, it has been well received on the Swiss market. Already having one well established product on the market has been helpful in building the Nordic Group here. The decision was then taken to bring other corporate products to the Swiss market. The previous general manager of Nordic Pharma Switzerland had brought some products, such as Hyalobarrier, to the local market. This transparent and highly viscous gels, forms a barrier to prevent or reduce post-surgical adhesions in the abdominal-pelvic area. It creates an anti-adhesion barrier, which

keeps the adjacent tissues separated after surgery, protecting against adhesions. The product is not reimbursed, but as a medical product, it builds on our gynecology portfolio. It enlarged our product offering, stabilizing our business, while staying within the same therapeutic area. With the Nordic Pharma France´s decision to bring their own rheumatology product to the market, the strategy of the Nordic group shifted to offering this product across our entire European business, as soon as possible. My number one responsibility is to develop this second leg for the affiliate, ensuring that we are not solely reliant on gynecology, but have a solid rheumatology business.

Today the Swiss affiliate already has more than six products on the market. How would you describe your strategy when it comes to growing your portfolio?

Our strategy is to concentrate on niche products, such as orphan drugs. We have a partnership with Sobi, Swedish Orphan Biovitrum, an international specialty healthcare company dedicated to rare diseases based in Stockholm. We market and sell Ferriprox, used to treat iron overload in patients with thalassaemia major, an inherited disease where patients are unable to make enough haemoglobin. Such partnerships are in line with our business strategy, not requiring a large sales force. Our focus is on smaller niche markets.

The key will be to find a fair price for our innovative rheumatology device. The Federal Office of Public Health sees our latest product as a generic. I am convinced that because of the close relationship we have with such stakeholders, we will be able to reach an agreement. The Swiss market is R&D driven; the emphasis is on innovation. In such an environment, I am confident that Nordic Pharma can establish itself here. By showing the value of our products, and the people behind them, we will gain the trust of patients and physicians alike.

What are the advantages of being a small to medium sized company in a market dominated by large multinationals?

The speed with which we can approach the customer is a major comparative advantage. Working for a larger organization, the sales team has to be implicated in the process, and a specific appointment often required.

Ever since 2001, the Nordic Group has focused on expanding business beyond Scandinavia to become a truly pan European company. Win this regard, wat is the strategic importance of Switzerland to Nordic Pharma?

It is important for us to be successful in Switzerland, associating ourselves with the innovative ecosystem that exists here. From a value perspective, there are a number of other countries in Europe that are strategically more significant; but from a reputation point of view, being successfully here is imperative. I am glad that the Nordic Group has recognized the potential that exists in Switzerland, deciding to establish their own affiliate in the country.

In September 2016, Nordic Switzerland reintroduced Trasylol, after market approval by Swissmedic. One of the particularities of the Swiss market is that they possess their own separate and distinctive regulatory framework, which entails different dossier filings and price negotiations to EU member states. How does this separate system effect your pan European strategy?

The case of Trasylol highlights how Switzerland is different to the rest of Europe. For the reintroduction of Trasylol, all other European countries required a patient registry. When a doctor prescribes this product for a primary operation, they are required to register the patient data in a registry. In Switzerland, where we have our own national regulatory approval process, we persuaded the authorities, that such a registry was not required. We communicate directly with our customers, and now we will start to communicate directly with the doctors. I will visit the large university centers to talk about the future of Trasylol. Switzerland´s approval process, when compared to the European average, is particularly fast at bringing products to market. As a small company, Switzerland, with its special national regulatory system, provides a big opportunity for Nordic Pharma.

On a more personal level, having worked for big pharma throughout your career, including the likes of J&J and Novartis, what is it that attracted you to building the Nordic Pharma name in Switzerland?

It is a unique opportunity to build a new affiliate, creating your own team spirit within the office. A company is only as valuable as its people. If you can maximize their potential, then the sky’s the limit. People must feel that they can develop their potential working for Nordic Pharma Switzerland.

Working for the start-up that we are today, to the established player we hope to be in the next five to ten years, will be a journey. Today we are reliant on an entrepreneurial spirit. We have hired our first key account manager for the Romandy area, the French-speaking parts of western Switzerland. A lot if on energy and commitment will be key for our employers over the next five years, as we build-up the affiliate.

What are the key goals that you want to accomplish with Nordic Pharma Switzerland over the next few years?

We want to be recognized as a partner in both gynecology and rheumatology, as well as in critical care and other niche products. As a bio-chemist by background, I have a passion about delivering new molecules to the market. I want to see good brands that are valued, reaching both patients and doctors as early as possible.

See more interviews