

Interview: Dr. Andrea Michael Meyer - General Manager, Sanofi Genzyme Switzerland



"We are the rare disease pioneer. This is the foundation of Sanofi Genzyme's success."

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Dr. Andrea Michael Meyer, general manager of Sanofi Genzyme Switzerland, reveals how the Swiss business has been experiencing year-on-year double-digit growth; how rare diseases was the foundation of Sanofi Genzyme's business and remains a key part of their DNA; and how a focus on patient centricity remains at the core of their success.

Switzerland was one of the latest Sanofi Genzyme European affiliates to be developed, being active since 2003. Can you give us an overall overview of the affiliate today?

In light of the recent reorganization of the entire Sanofi Group, Sanofi Genzyme Switzerland has grown significantly in size with the Group's oncology portfolio now falling under our domain. Today Sanofi Genzyme acts as Sanofi's specialty care division. Our business now consists of a range of franchises including: multiple sclerosis, rare diseases, as well as oncology and we are now expanding into rheumatoid arthritis and atopic dermatitis.

Sanofi's CEO Oliver Brandicourt has said that Sanofi Genzyme was one of the main drivers of growth over the last year. Indeed, the first quarter results for 2016, released in April, showed the 12th consecutive quarter of growth above 20 percent. Has this excellent global performance been reflected at the local level in Switzerland?

Sanofi Genzyme Switzerland has also been experiencing year-on-year double-digit growth. This has been driven both by our pre-existing portfolio, as well as the launch of newer products, such as in

the area of MS. Our two MS products, one orally applied and the other an infusion therapy have recently been launched in the Swiss market, both of which are adding to our growth. On the rare diseases/endocrinology side, we have our important established products covering particular unmet medical needs in lysosomal storage diseases and thyroid cancer. Also our oncology portfolio is contributing significantly to our sustained success.

In June the Swiss Multiple Sclerosis Society, in partnership with the University of Zurich, launched the Swiss National MS Registry. What contribution did Sanofi Genzyme make?

As an important and trusted stakeholder in the field of MS, we were involved in the discussions around the national MS registry, alongside other pharmaceutical companies researching in this area, as well as MS clinicians and scientists. Ultimately, however, Swiss MS Registry was established by the Swiss Multiple Sclerosis Society. It is independence and targeting scientific needs, helping to advance MS research in Switzerland by gaining insights into real life data across the whole MS population. Its introduction is certainly a milestone.

Is it not surprising that it took a highly developed market such as Switzerland such a long time to set up such a registry?

Setting up a registry is a timely process. It involves a large number of stakeholders such as medical and patient associations, industry partners and authorities, all of which need to be aligned. In order to advance R&D around MS products, you need primarily phase 1 to phase 3 trials, as well as basic research, the latter an area in which Switzerland is very strong. Real life study data is often conducted in phase 4 cohort studies individually by industry. A lot of data is generated around the usage of particular products by the respective industry partners. One has to avoid an overlap between what is being done by a major registry and what is being done individually by the different companies. The registry can provide a much broader view of MS in Switzerland. E.g. we still do not know exactly how many patients suffer from MS in Switzerland: the numbers range from 10,000 to 15,000. It is important to have such broader information about the disease, alongside specific research around individual products.

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Sanofi Genzyme's other main focus area has traditionally been rare diseases. How important is this business unit for you in Switzerland?

Genzyme was founded in 1981 as a biotech company focused exclusively on rare diseases. We are the rare disease pioneer. This is the foundation of Sanofi Genzyme's success. Rare diseases remain

the DNA of our business. We have a very patient centric approach. While today patient centricity has become an industry buzzword, we are, to my knowledge, the only company that was built around one patient, and a mother who learned that her boy had a rare genetic disorder. We attach a lot of importance to patient services around the therapies. Key is that the patient receives the most appropriate therapy. We are convinced that if we will live by our philosophy of putting the patient's interests at the heart of our doing, this will be good not only for our rare diseases business, but also in areas such as MS and oncology. For this reason, patient centricity will remain our number one priority.

At the heart of a successful rare diseases strategy is diagnosis. In a country like Switzerland that enjoys the reputation of having one of the world's best healthcare systems, one would imagine that this is the perfect environment for companies active in this area. Is this the case? How well are rare diseases taken into account in Switzerland?

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There are around 6,000 to 8,000 rare diseases in this country affecting about 7% or 862,000 of the Swiss population. A disease is considered rare in Switzerland if there are 5 or less diagnosis per year from a total of 10,000 people. According to a recent report by Interpharma, the Association of Pharmaceutical Research Companies of Switzerland, based on a study conducted by the University of Lausanne, it is estimated that around 7 percent of the Swiss population suffers from a rare disease. Many of these are orphan diseases, which presents a particular challenge. Many orphan diseases are misdiagnosed or only diagnosed after a long period of time, although with advances in diagnostics and treatment approaches, we are seeing improvements in this regard. Many of the rare diseases which we have drugs for have broad symptoms, overlapping with many other diseases. This is the biggest challenge we face when it comes to rare diseases: the symptoms are often broad or the disease is due to its very low abundance in the population not top of mind. Key is therefore to raise awareness around these diseases and its key symptoms which should trigger a diagnosis or at least an exclusion diagnosis earlier. Time between first symptoms and a diagnosis does still take too long in Switzerland; although time to diagnosis in the diseases we oversee is improving.

What are your core objectives for the next five years?

We want to continue making it easier for patients to have access to the products that they need. Ensuring patients have access to Sanofi Genzyme's treatments is key because they are for

patients with rare and special unmet medical needs, providing hope where there had been none before. Working with healthcare professionals we can tailor our services to their and their patients' needs. We will further leverage our oncology portfolio. In parallel, we will continue to drive our MS launch trajectory, to enable access to our two excellent products to as many MS patients in need of them as possible. We will also grow the range of products within our rare diseases portfolio, an area that will remain essential to our continued success. Last but not least we will expand our reach into new areas of unmet medical needs such as rheumatoid arthritis and atopic dermatitis. This, altogether, will allow us to continue our success story in the future.

What is it that motivates you most in your work leading Sanofi Genzyme in Switzerland?

Serving patients is my number one motivator; being successful for patients by providing access to our great portfolio. Sanofi Genzyme does not offer me-too products. We provide essential medicine for patients in need. It is also very motivating to interact with our stakeholders at eye level as their trusted partner. Lastly, being part of this great team we have assembled at Sanofi Genzyme keeps us all motivated. We have a unique spirit here, having kept much of the biotech atmosphere. We have a can do attitude which is highly energizing and key to our continued success.

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