Interview: Arnaud Loriers – Head of Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg, Novartis



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Novartis' newest Head for the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg provides a fascinating insight into the Luxembourg market and reveals how this small nation has found itself in pole position for future pharmaceutical innovation.

After over a decade with GSK, you joined Novartis one and half years ago. What made you join Novartis and what objectives have you been given in developing this affiliate further?

I joined Novartis as part of the 2015 deal between GSK and Novartis. It was a big change and it developed into a great opportunity for me. I was offered the opportunity to lead the further development of Novartis in Luxembourg with a dedicated approach to answer Luxembourg's specific needs.

Could you please provide an overview of Novartis' presence in Luxembourg; what exactly is the scope and scale of your operations in the country?

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Novartis has 20 years of global experience in innovation and Luxembourg's willingness to innovate certainly ties in with our philosophy. We are active in six main disease areas: cardiology where we are bringing the first innovation in 20 years for patients with heart failure, I&D, oncology,

respiratory, ophthalmology and neuroscience It is important to ask why we are operating in Luxembourg, why are we increasing our presence and what do we want to achieve.

We have recognized Luxembourg's eagerness to be a leader in innovation and we want to adopt a focused strategy to ensure that Luxembourg patients access the most innovative treatments as early as possible. We currently have four clinical trials running in Luxembourg for patients with asthma, lung cancer and renal cancer and a fifth trial opening soon. We recognize the importance of developing strong partnerships with the different players in public health. It is interesting to note that Luxembourg and Belgium combined participate in 26% of global clinical trials run by Novartis.

Our R&D investments are driven by scientific innovation to answer unmet needs. Within the pharmaceutical industry, Novartis has the largest commitment to innovation reinvesting 21% into R&D, in comparison with the industry's average of 16%. Our strength lies in the fact that we are leading in various therapeutic areas and aim to excel in every aspect of our activities. At the end of the day, our goal is to improve quality of life of patients. For instance, if you have a severe case of psoriasis you are less likely to socialize. We have developed a treatment that helps clear patients' skin, in turn enabling them to enjoy a dramatically improved quality of life.

As you just mentioned, Novartis conducts clinical trials in Luxembourg despite the small pool of patients and the absence of a medical university. Why does Novartis feel Luxembourg is an interesting and viable location to conduct trials? What assets does the country hold?

The expertise of Luxembourg specialists is widely recognized . Besides this expertise, we see this as an opportunity for both Luxembourg physicians to gain experience with our newest drugs and for patients to access innovative therapies that could potentially improve and prolong their life. The Luxembourg market has been recognized by the pharmaceutical industry as country that has always provided fast access to innovative drugs in comparison to some other EU countries. .

Our ambition is to strengthen our footprint in Luxembourg and further build meaningful and trustworthy relationships to become the partner of choice for the Luxembourg Health stakeholders. We have strong collaborations with a variety of medical associations and work with our whole team dedicated to Luxembourg on providing healthcare professionals the most accurate and up to date information about our products. This is crucial as innovation often brings with it an amount of uncertainty and our work in close partnership with physicians ensures an optimal experience for the patients.

There is quite some debate as to whether Luxembourg should build a Medical University to move things forward. What impact do you think this could have on the life sciences ecosystem in the country?

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There is already one university but admittedly remaining small. Medical students completing their curriculum outside of Luxembourg benefit from expertise and practice from other countries which helps to broaden their experience. That is a noticeable trait of Luxembourgish mentality. For instance, how many languages does a Luxembourgish citizen speak? – At least three, usually four. The Luxembourgish mentality is one of flexibility, openness and always questioning how bring improvement.

How would you describe the regulatory environment in Luxembourg for an international player such as Novartis, in terms of market access, pricing and reimbursement?

We must answer one main question and that iswhat kind of benefit does our product bring to patients? For us, this is the critical aspect. Patients must be at the center of everything we do.

We need to demonstrate how, on one hand, we are able to provide an improvement to a specific unmet medical need, and how, on the other hand, we can work with external stakeholders to ensure sustainability for the Luxembourg health care system.

What are your impressions of how Luxembourg has evolved in the last five-eight years? What do you think are Luxembourg's key assets for pharmaceutical success?

Luxembourg can be considered as the last emerging market of Europe.. One thing in particular that has really impressed us about Luxembourg is the quality of everything they do. Typically, Luxembourg citizens are open, flexible, passionate about their work and seize all the opportunities that arise around them. This ability to spot opportunities and the thirst for innovation could lead to Luxembourg being recognized as a big laboratory.

Like many, the first time you come to Luxembourg, you are positively surprised by what has been accomplished in such a sort span of time, to diversify away from the financial services sector and build a true life sciences ecosystem. What role can Novartis play in this grand vision of Luxembourg becoming a niche destination for innovation?

Just over a year ago, we dedicated a whole team to support our activities in Luxembourg. This team comprizes Medical reps and MSL, Key Account Managers, SCM, Market Access specialists,…,

and myself. This demonstrates that Novartis is keen to play an active role in the evolution of the Luxembourg healthcare system. We want to ensure that GP, specialists and pharmacists are aware of the innovative treatments we offer. Pharmacists play a key role in ensuring that patients understand how to take their treatment correctly for it to be most effective.

Looking at the digitalization of our industry, Luxembourg can also play an interesting role, given its strong ICT heritage. How can the lifesciences sector as a whole, and Novartis in particular, leverage on such assets?

This is a very important aspect of our business as all stakeholders must have accurate data on all markets. Employees within Novartis obviously check and make sure we have collected accurate data. Equally, it is something that the Luxembourg health community should have a vested interest in. Luxembourg medical associations should be asking the question: How does Luxembourg make sure that all relevant institutions have access to the correct medical data? It is an investment for both Novartis and the health community in Luxembourg and we need to act as partners to collectively save lives and answer important medical needs of patients. Armed with the right information, we can engage with the medical community to make sure we are capable of answering unmet medical needs.

What message do you have for those outside Luxembourg about the market and Novartis' future role in the country?

Luxembourg is a nation that has managed to innovate and make huge progress with their healthcare system in a very short amount of time. However, that is the Luxembourgish mentality: they make things happen. Novartis has increased its efforts to demonstrate that as a company it is the perfect partner to assist with further healthcare improvements. We want to reinforce our footprint in Luxembourg. We have individuals collaborating closely with pharmacists and doctors as we strongly believe the benefits from these ties will help benefit patients.

Despite not currently having an office in Luxembourg, at present we have 20 people dedicated to collaboration on the Luxembourg market. This team understands the dynamics of the country and of its healthcare community. We identify their needs and look for the right solution answer those particular needs in a fast and flexible way. In summary, for the last year, we have both invested and heavily supported the idea of proximity both geographically and in business.

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