

# Interview: Karl Peter Schwarz - General Manager, LEO Pharma Austria

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*Karl Peter Schwarz, general manager of the Austrian affiliate of LEO Pharma, an ambitious Danish company leading the way in innovative dermatology treatments, provides an in-depth look into how global partnerships and acquisitions have impacted the strategies and operations of the Austrian affiliate. Equally, he provides an insight into how LEO Pharma's cutting-edge drugs are positively effecting lives and what being a patient-centric company really means.*

**LEO Pharma CEO, Gitte Aabo, has put forward an ambitious 2020 plan to bring the company to the forefront of the dermatology world and thus far there have been some headline partnerships and acquisitions to bolster this push. How have these activities at a global level trickled down to the local Austrian affiliate?**

It was less of a trickling down effect and more like a giant wave! Especially the AstraZeneca partnership which they have given us little lead time to prepare - saying that - it was a really pleasant surprise that the products will be entering the market so quickly. In 2016, LEO Pharma acquired Astellas dermatology portfolio and thus far it has been a hugely positive step forward, despite the fact we have had to reorganise slightly. Austria was one of the first markets to fully implement this portfolio in an indication new to LEO, and this is a credit to our great team that has attracted the attention of headquarters as well as local stakeholders.

This former Astellas portfolio was a chance for us to reinvigorate the dermatology industry in Austria as these products had not been promoted since 2013. It is a fantastic opportunity to deliver patients with products that can really make a difference in shaping their everyday lives. All in all, these partnerships and acquisitions have given us an ability to broaden our portfolio and I can thankfully say it has been a smooth transition. Even at a local level we have built on a strong relationship with our diversifying partners, and this has heavily contributed to our patient-centric approach. This is of growing importance as atopic dermatitis prevalence is extremely high and we see this fully integrated range as a necessity for the Austrian population.

### **What strategy did you use to successfully launch the new portfolio?**

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The first challenge was the technical aspect, ensuring that all the regulatory approvals were in check - while in the meantime - evolving the mindset of the team so they understand LEO Pharma is growing very fast and we must take advantage of this great business development opportunity.

Furthermore, we gave the message to our prescribers and the patients that LEO Pharma is now fully active in atopic dermatitis. This was increasingly important as this range of products had not been promoted in previous years. The response has been exciting and dermatologists are ecstatic that this innovative portfolio is now being utilized to its greatest potential and we are backing them up 100 percent - which in the end - results in healthier patients.

### **How does LEO Pharma put in place its patient centric approach?**

In Austria, like many developed markets, promotion of prescription products is prohibited: therefore, we must approach our final consumer, the patient, in a strategic manner. LEO Pharma globally is developing a new system of multichannel marketing and driving this change through our company recently set up the "LEO Innovation Lab" in Copenhagen. In Austria, we are about to implement the innovation lab's discoveries, and have to adapt them to fit the domestic market. Dermatological diseases are generally lifelong conditions, incurable; therefore, we must ensure patients' daily lives are improved and made as easy as possible so they are motivated to continue with their treatments.

### **What is the strategic importance of the Austrian market in LEO Pharma's operations?**

It is growing! Fortunately, we have the full range of the company's portfolio which was not the case in every market, and even five years ago. This indicates we have definitely moved forward in headquarters international plans, despite relatively low drug prices for a wealthy country and the

difficulties we have encountered in gaining market access.

### **How have you been able to navigate the challenges of market access?**

In the Austrian outpatient setting we only have one national payer, the Main Association of Austrian Social Insurance Institutions. Our interactions with the reimbursement authority have been very constructive as LEO Pharma patient solutions provide real scientific evidence on how on apart from improved clinical efficiency we benefit our patients through increased adherence and compliance for long term treatment. I believe we have brought a very positive effect in such a short period of time by delivering real innovation, not just incremental changes.

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For example, if you look at psoriasis patients previously they were required to apply to their skin a vitamin-d based product and/or a topical steroid, twice a day, for eight weeks, with each application taking around one hour. They then needed to wait until it dried before they were able to dress themselves. In a few weeks, we will launch a game changer for these patients, the world's first ever topical spray foam that can be applied in a few minutes daily for four weeks, treats all severities of psoriasis, from mild to severe, and has a very fast onset and high rate of efficacy. Equally, is it the first time a topical treatment has the backing by clinical data on one of the leading symptoms like itching. This is incredibly important to improve the lives of psoriasis patients worldwide as they now can live a normal life, and can sleep throughout the night without the uncontrollable urge to scratch at their irritated skin.

### **Headquarters recently has taken a giant leap into biological dermatology. When will this enter Austria?**

2018! It is billing up to be a very exciting year as we will be launching our innovative spray foam for psoriasis in January and later on in the year our new biological dermatology range. It is really a new era, and a time where the company is offering the whole package of topical solutions for all severities of psoriasis as well as innovative antibody treatments. We must prepare and reorganize how we function, and in Austria we have already begun setting up a separate bio-derma department.

We are really differentiating ourselves from our competition with our holistic approach that is very patient centric. In-turn this has assisted in our negotiations with the reimbursement authorities who understand market access for these innovative products is a real must, as they are stimulating a real revolution in treating life altering dermatological conditions.

**You have been in the company for seven years now. What motivates you to come to work every day?**

LEO Pharma is a Danish company, and despite being very easygoing the organization is extremely effective. They are able to provide an atmosphere that is transparent, allowing the flow of information, both vertically and horizontally within the hierarchy. They do not only talk empowerment, they implement it. All in all, everything is all very open and stimulates streamlined processes within the company as we understand how it all works and the direction we are going in.

**As the company moves into very exciting times, what are the future aspirations of the Austrian affiliate?**

I envision we will adapt very quickly to the changes implemented at the global level, which will in turn lure the eyes of headquarters to ensure Austria remains as a first wave nation for innovative products. Looking at the portfolio, we will have more antibody treatments in topical dermatitis to further improve patients' lives. Moreover, we must take advantage of global business development processes at the domestic level and continue to modernize our approach by becoming larger while in the meantime being more efficient in our systems.

Lastly, before I took over the affiliate, staff turnover was quite high. I hope that our team can continue to be a stable unit to help build our local brand in the eyes of our stakeholders, like medical professionals and – above all else – we must continue to put patients' needs first.

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