

Interview: Adam Czerw - Country Manager LEO Pharma, Poland



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Adam Czerw, country manager of LEO Pharma Poland, discusses the impressive growth of the affiliate, especially since the global 2016 purchase of Astellas' dermatology portfolio, as well as the encouraging development of LEO's first ever reimbursed product on the Polish market. Furthermore, he highlights the key steps to further reward dermatological innovation and LEO's role in establishing a more patient-centric Polish healthcare ecosystem.

LEO Pharma has, in recent years, been very active in partnerships and acquisitions, most importantly the 2016 purchase of Astellas' dermatology range. How has this movement at the global level impacted the Polish affiliate?

The Polish office was established in 2011, and opened officially in 2012 when LEO Pharma took over sales operations from a third-party partner. We began more as a start-up style company; therefore, the acquisition of Astellas' large dermatology portfolio was a complete game changer for the local affiliate and a complete 180-degree shift in the running of our business.

Within the company, there was a lot of mention about how important this move was for China and Russia, though it is important to note that the Polish affiliate was the third biggest beneficiary of the deal. Since then, together with benefits of the first ever reimbursed LEO product, we have been able to increase our sales eight-fold, while in the meantime developing a full-fledged scope of services and moving into a more mature style set-up.

What infrastructure challenges did you encounter with such rapid growth?

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It was and still is a great time, as during times of growth you are motivated to work even harder. Our staff numbers increased significantly during that period; therefore, we were able to handle a lot more duties in our operations, and now our sales team is more or less how it should be constructed. Nevertheless, in terms of functional support, we still require assistance from time to time from our regional cluster as we operate in an extremely lean manner.

The company takes a tailored approach depending on the country. How is the portfolio of LEO Pharma portrayed and distributed in the Polish market?

The majority of our sales are coming from the Astellas portfolio, which has opened up many possibilities compared to previously when we were offering mostly skin infection and psoriasis products.

The great success that has occurred internally within our Polish operations has moved us towards driving forward innovation. After five years of long negotiations in 2016, we had finally our first dermatological product reimbursed. This has been the greatest milestone for LEO Pharma in Poland since the opening of the affiliate, which, on top of the portfolio purchase, will help us grow in the short and long term.

We now have a full focus on our Rx range, and we are driving forward LEO's global 2025 initiative to be considered an extremely innovative company and true leader in medical dermatology, especially with our new range of biologics.

How is dermatology valued in the Polish market?

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This is one of many reasons why Poland is far behind many other countries in terms of the market introduction of biological treatments in dermatology for psoriasis. We only have 380 patients across the country that are receiving this advanced, innovative treatment that is able to completely change a patient's life. There is a program that enables patients to receive these products, though the inclusion criteria are quite strict and only patients that are extremely sick are

considered. Another issue is that patients can only use the reimbursed biologic product for certain time, while they should be taking it as long as necessary, sometimes throughout their entire life

Dermatology treatment is not purely about curing patients, but more centred around improving the overall quality of life of the individual living with the condition. How are you able to portray this message to relevant stakeholders so they factor this into reimbursement decisions?

As a country we have not reached this point yet, and – unfortunately – quality of life is not a factor that sells a product when attempting to achieve reimbursement. It is more about saving lives and promoting the use of drugs that fight against life threatening diseases.

Nevertheless, we are moving in the right direction, and the fact that we now received the reimbursement of our first product is a clear positive step. Saying that, we do have another topical product, that is scientifically proven to produce even better results for patients, but at the moment authorities are not willing to buy in to the added value of that product yet. We need to find way to present our case more effectively.

How have you been able to educate the broader medical community about the innovation LEO pharma brings to the market?

The company has always had a very strong medical focus from the beginning. During the growth and development of the affiliate, this aspect did not shift, and this is what differentiates us and makes us so successful in getting our message across. Every sales person that joins us goes through a vigorous training program that allows them to deliver the message of the exciting innovation LEO pharma is bringing to the market, and more importantly the positive impact we are making in changing people's lives.

LEO Pharma CEO and president, Gitte Aabo, constantly touches on the need for a patient-centric healthcare environment. How are you able to bring this approach to the Polish healthcare ecosystem?

I believe it is a great opportunity and the challenge in the same time as the patients' position is still relatively weak throughout the Polish healthcare ecosystem. We have started with Quality Care® implementation in Poland a few years ago, and followed this up with the launch of our own portal, with the objective of facilitating patient to doctor communication. This interaction is of critical importance, especially for the patients and has been proven again by 1400 patients in the recently published PSO Happy report – a first study exploring the relationship between living with psoriasis

and happiness.

We view doctors as our partners along the patient journey as they are the ones to bring innovation directly to the patients. We hope that the extra work we are doing to interact closely with patients will help bring LEO Pharma to the forefront.

The affiliate in recent years has grown rapidly. Moving forward, what are the aspirations of LEO pharma Poland over the next three years?

We are in an exciting period; at the point of innovation and gaining market access of new medicines. We still have a lot of work to do in Poland as LEO's global strategy is focused heavily in advanced treatments and biologics.

Therefore, we need to discover solutions to be able to achieve our products' reimbursement at an even broader level to be a leader in shifting public agenda to reward dermatology and value the quality of life of affected patients. There needs to be a friendlier perception in this therapeutic area, and only then will Poland truly advance these life-altering conditions via innovative treatments, both topicals and LEO's new biological dermatology range. It is an exciting time ahead and we are looking forward to it!

You started the Polish affiliate back in 2012. What legacy would you like to leave from your time here?

Coming to LEO after many years in big pharma was a challenge, especially considering the very small size of the company and all associated risks. Nevertheless, I have never regretted the decision and it has been an exciting journey thus far and will be even more so moving forward.

When I do eventually finish my time here I want LEO pharma to be a mature modern company that is effectively competing with the key players in dermatology in topical, biologic and potentially even newer areas. Therefore, we must lead from the front in our sector and drive forward the need for dermatology to be valued and reimbursed at the level it deserves - so Polish patients are able to receive world-class medical care. This will help to complete our mission "to help people achieve healthy skin."

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