Interview: Sabina Sampławska – Director, Head of Life Sciences, KPMG Poland



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Sabina Sampławska, director, head of life sciences at KPMG Poland, discusses the challenge of pricing pressures and how their innovative services help companies manage this trend, as well as the need for data transparency in constructing correct strategies for clients. She also highlights the role KPMG is playing in bringing forward digital disruption to Poland's healthcare landscape and the future goal of bringing greater diversity to the Polish life sciences ecosystem.

What have been the key milestones of KPMG in Poland over the last two years?

I have been the head of life sciences at KPMG in Poland since 2015, after having worked across different role within the healthcare industry. My background is international tax, and this is a topic that pharmaceutical companies tackle constantly; therefore, I naturally came across the sector and slowly my career in life sciences began.

Within the last few years we were able to build interdisciplinary team of lawyers, tax advisors, financial advisors and business consultants with a deep understanding of pharma industry and focused in the life sciences sector.

The most important achievement of my team over recent years has been the strengthening of relations with my clients, while in the meantime establishing ties with new players. This was done by assisting them in resolving their challenges in the market and creating a personal bond with the

key stakeholders in the respective organizations.

What are the major areas in the healthcare system that KPMG is currently focused on?

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The private healthcare sector in Poland is still developing and this recently has been a larger focus for us – although – this is not a key area in the entire life science market. The private industry is growing quickly, though regulatory changes have potential to cause adverse effects in this area.

The other side, public healthcare, is the side of healthcare that usually is not active in requesting services from consultancies as there is a constant lack of funds. Nevertheless, the current government is pushing to create a healthcare system that is significantly more efficient. As a result, they will need the support of KPMG to be a major partner, so they can develop an effective system in the short and long-term.

KPMG internationally has performed interesting projects for the healthcare sectors aimed at optimisation of costs and processes. We believe that also Polish entities could benefit a lot from these solutions.

What are the main challenges your clients currently face within the Polish healthcare environment?

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The constant obstacle our clients are witnessing is the pricing pressures being placed upon them from the payers – the Ministry of Health and National health fund. They are always looking to reduce reimbursed drug prices, and Poland already has some of the lowest prices in Europe. We recognize that further development of modern, sophisticated risk sharing arrangements could be a relevant answer to this challenge.

Furthermore, our clients face several issues in the area of regulatory compliance, tax and transfer pricing and there is widespread interest in creating a process that is considered cost-efficient. In this regard, there is an industry push to drive forward digitalisation and automation of processes. KPMG is assisting our clients, so they can understand what beneficial moves make the most sense, in terms of short and long-term strategies to implement. This entails topics such as innovative management systems, monitoring procedures and distribution strategies.

How important is data transparency for clients?

Clearly, there is a strong expectation of regulators for a maximum data transparency. Our role is to help our clients implement solutions that enable them to present transparent data in a clear and precise manner; therefore, allowing the correct strategic decisions to be made. This topic has many regulatory requirements, and we must ensure that customers can adapt effectively to any shift in the industry. Furthermore, we assess the risks involved as data protection is a concern for all parties involved.

What are the innovative services that you offer to help your clients adapt to the pricing pressures of Polish healthcare?

We are actively discussing with our clients the new types of pricing mechanisms for therapies. KPMG is assessing the impact of a specific drug price, and what can be agreed upon using differing market access models, such as risk sharing arrangements. The goal is that the commercial pharmaceutical industry can continue to generate revenues, while in the meantime the government is content with the associated costs; a win-win for both sides of the pharmaceutical market.

From a hospital perspective, we must ensure they are ready for the possible administrative burdens of the market access mechanisms negotiated between the pharmaceutical companies and government. KPMG must be a middle man connecting all the stakeholders involved along each level of healthcare.

The digital age is becoming more relevant each year. How well prepared is Poland for digitalization?

Everyone is ready and looking forward to it! On the other hand, no clear path has been set by the government on how to approach digital disruption as a collective healthcare industry. The companies are looking into this global trend very strongly as they understand it has great potential in reducing costs and helping patients get better access to medical information and therapies.

How are you assisting your customers to adapt to this market trend?

KPMG has been discussing several strategic projects, and thus far we have been actively involved in the digitalisation and automation of the internal process and manging the distribution chain. The initial focus is to implement management control over various areas of activities in companies.

The next step is to set-up external solutions and be key players in linking companies with hospitals, wholesalers and patient so all areas of healthcare can talk together in a digital sense. This is an idea everyone is waiting for action, and we must be pro-active to be the catalyst for this

movement. Our ambition is to partner companies in recognition of benefits of digital revolution that have a potential to transform their businesses.

What trends are you most excited for in the future that can open up opportunities for KPMG in Poland?

Giving the power to the leaders of hospitals in the public sector will open up opportunities to drive forward a more cost efficient and digital approach to the healthcare system. In order to do this, hospitals must first be given the adequate funding they require to finance activities, such as the services that KPMG can offer. This is not only about increasing healthcare spending across the board, but equally allocating the funds on hand in the correct manner.

How does KPMG differentiate itself from the competition?

We are able to look at any obstacles faced by out clients in a holistic manner as we have experts working closely together from an array of different areas. From legal, tax and management consulting experts to IT, advisory and medical professionals, we have all levels of the industry covered. This allows us to give a horizontal perspective, rather than a silo approach.

What is your main strategic priority moving forward?

I recognize that diversity in backgrounds and competencies of our Life Sciences team allowed us to present exceptional and innovative services to clients. I believe that diversity will provide flexibility necessary to act in a fast-changing environment. I plan to continue to work on diversity in every aspect of it.

At a global level KPMG is strongly involved in promoting the role of woman, and KPMG in Poland equally is very active in ensuring women can build their career in life sciences. We have supported the “Exceptional woman in life science” campaign and hope that we can play a major role in the next two years to further contribute to this diversity awareness and build on the already impressive influence of Polish woman in this sector.

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