Interview: Jacek Mazurkiewicz – General Manager, AbbVie Poland



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Jacek Mazurkiewicz, general manager of AbbVie Poland, discusses the recent exciting achievements of the affiliate, including the reimbursement of its products in recent years and the set up one of its three global financial centers in Krakow. Additionally, he highlights the key role AbbVie Poland is playing in driving forward the domestic R&D scene and overall innovation landscape through its clinical research center. Finally, he provides an insight into the affiliate's strong support for local start-ups in healthcare IT, through the HealthTech program initiative.

How have your first few years in the position been and what have been the key milestones for AbbVie Poland since 2015?

The AbbVie culture is great, being strongly oriented towards the patient, and we have here a great team making tremendous achievements and creating a very positive atmosphere. At AbbVie, we are very active in discussions with all relevant stakeholders in order to better understand the market situation and identify the areas that require our innovation, so patients can receive better care.

One of the major milestones has been the mid-2015 reimbursement of the first non-interferon treatment for HCV in Poland. We estimate that around 10,000 patients have been cured from the disease thanks to this therapy. This is a great achievement for all involved. Overall, the HCV treatment program set up by the Ministry of Health is seen as a model solution due to its

broadness of access to patients in need.

Furthermore, we have recently been able to gain access under reimbursement for our advanced Parkinson's treatment. This is great motivation for our team at AbbVie Poland, as it provides a significant improvement in the quality of life of the affected patients.

How have you been able to positively navigate the market in recent years and gain reimbursement for AbbVie's innovative therapies?

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There are many factors that entail this success. Firstly, it is essential to truly understand the requirements of the health authorities, patients and physicians. We have enormous respect for the Ministry of Health & National Health Fund staff as they have the enormously difficult task to manage the balance between best therapy access and limited budget.

As a company we are committed to enhancing care for patients beyond treatments. We have witnessed in Poland that the patient voice is becoming vital in shaping improvements in Poland's healthcare landscape. Therefore, we are engaged in different aspects to support patient groups and better understand the disease needs. Moreover, we implement global and local AbbVie campaigns; for example, "Simply Active", an initiative to show that people with chronic diseases can be active in normal daily life, carrying out for instance occupational activities. Another example is the implementation of the "Don't turn your back on it" – a disease awareness campaign that draws public attention to the causes of chronic inflammatory back pain.

We also strive to support physicians in different aspects of their daily work: this year we created "reuBOX" – an application dedicated to providing GP's and rheumatologists quick and intuitive access to information on the most common rheumatic conditions. Given the complexity of the Polish healthcare ecosystem and its overall development, it is important for AbbVie to be active in listening and participating in these local initiatives.

What do the clinical trials activity of AbbVie Poland entail?

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Poland is increasing in importance for AbbVie's global clinical trials operations and the affiliate will continue to grow moving forward. In our Warsaw office we have a rapidly expanding clinical trials department and in Poland we currently conduct over 40 trials in immunology, oncology, infectious diseases and general medicine. This is a significant increase over last year, and is also reflecting on

the ongoing increase of staff.

Our operations are truly providing to the global trial operations, as Poland has a great abundance of high-quality study centers. AbbVie Poland actually works with about 200 centers as of now. Last but not least, the large population of the country ensures a smooth recruitment for our clinical trials.

How does Poland place itself on the clinical trials global map and capitalise on its potential in this area?

We are already on the map! Administration can always be improved and there are always processes to be streamlined. On a different level, the Ministry of Economic development has employed a task force to improve not only the clinical trials aspect, but to strengthen the overall biotechnology scene in Poland. We believe that the administrative hurdles of the past will soon be dissolved as the government is acknowledging the economic positives of clinical research, while in the meantime allowing polish patients and physicians the opportunity to experience the most innovative products.

This push for innovation started many years ago when Poland established itself as a global innovator for IT, more specifically in the FinTech area. AbbVie has utilized this strong point and has established in 2014 one of its three Global Shared Services Center in Krakow, now entailing roughly 90 employees that provide financial and payroll support to 65 countries.

AbbVie Poland has been heavily involved in the initiative, “HealthTech Program”. How did this opportunity come about and what are the objectives of this endeavour?

Annually, Krakow hosts one the biggest conferences for start-ups in the world. In 2016, I met with the CEO of Heart Warsaw and we both noticed that start-ups from the fast developing healthtech area were nearly not represented equally. We discussed the potential to grow this area, and AbbVie Poland has since helped promote start-ups in this area. We see a significant potential here, with digital solutions now starting to redefine diagnosis and care. The cooperation with The Heart, allows us to capitalize on the nation’s direct expertise.

It is a very competitive process between nations to attract services, such as the finance center and clinical trials. What must the Polish affiliate do so that the global company continually invests in Poland?

It is a simple calculation and is very much results driven. After the initial investment into Poland, they have seen and will continue to witness very effective and efficient operations. This plays a

huge role in future decisions.

Additionally, when we have international guests, they are astonished, on the constant development and improvement of the nation. Poland is forever redefining and reshaping itself, and it a great challenge to adapt to this ever-changing environment, but it also shows the country's great potential. The Ministry of Economic development has a very ambitious plan and thus far we have been impressed with their ideas and speed of implementation.

What is AbbVie doing to be a key contributor in driving forward Polish healthcare?

Obviously, as a strong employer and investor in the country, our footprint continues to grow. At the patient level, we are always looking to improve the overall quality of life of the Polish citizens. Furthermore, we are looking more and more into investments for diagnosis, and last year we engaged in a system for early diagnosis of rheumatoid arthritis.

At an industry level, we are vitally contributing to the relevant associations and aim to be an integral voice moving forward. As a company, we are focusing heavily in corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities, like Week of Possibilities – an initiative that unites AbbVie employees around the world with a purpose to give back to our local communities. Abbvie Poland has joined the initiative in 2016 and our employees donated nearly 1000 hours to support three organizations supporting children with disabilities, young people with severe visual impairments, and education of youth. Also, we are moving to foster innovation in healthcare IT as outlined earlier, and this in-turn will allow the local ecosystem to reach its full potential.

Looking ahead, what are your aspirations over the next two years?

If you look at our core business, the future movement is into the field of oncology, with an initial focus in haemo-oncology. This will transform AbbVie's offering, as the oncology portfolio is very broad and solid tumours have a large burden on the society. New indications to combat areas such as small cell lung cancer and Acute myeloid leukaemia (AML) are very exciting, as well as the new company's next generation of immunology treatments. All in all – a lot of opportunities ahead at AbbVie, especially in Poland!

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