Interview: Drago Vuina – Corporate Vice President, Novo Nordisk Eastern Europe



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Drago Vuina, corporate vice-president of Novo Nordisk Eastern Europe, highlights Poland as the most significant market in the region and the on-going commitment to make innovative treatment options available for patients. Furthermore, he discusses Novo Nordisk's strong commitment to social responsibility in each country throughout the region and the need to be an active player and integral part of the domestic community.

As the corporate vice-president of Eastern Europe, what is your mandate?

My responsibility is to oversee Novo Nordisk's operations within Eastern Europe, which consists of 17 countries. Geographically these are the countries located between the three seas: Baltic, Adriatic and Black sea. This region is an important player in Novo Nordisk´s European function, making up around 15 percent of sales. Moreover, we are proud of the strong growth in this region coming from our innovative treatments that provide the best solutions within their classes.

What is the importance of Poland within the region?

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Poland is the most significant market in the region. We see a huge potential for the country as the majority of Polish patients are treated with older treatments, not benefiting from innovative solutions available in other countries of the region. Therefore, there is a lot of potential for us to

improve their lives. It is our role to work in cooperation with authorities, and provide evidence in order to invest in better treatments and improve the outcomes for Polish patients, while at the same time preventing future costs due to complications of diabetes down the road, such as amputations, heart attacks, stroke, kidney failure and blindness to name a few.

What are the key milestones you have been able to achieve in the last few years?

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Over recent years, we have been quite successful throughout the region in introducing innovative therapies in diabetes care and haemophilia.

We built on our responsibility to explain to key stakeholders the benefits of considering the long-term perspective of healthcare, and in this regard, we have been successful in majority of our countries in this region. Additionally, we have witnessed an increased number of patients that manage their own condition and reaching desired treatment goals and outcomes by using Novo Nordisk solutions. We have achieved this by working together with medical community, authorities and patient associations.

What are your goals moving forward?

We want to help more people manage their chronic diseases, so they can live easier lives and we aim to introduce solutions tailored more to patient needs. My overriding objective is to continue this journey at Novo Nordisk.

Our region, despite most of it being now part of European Union is still lagging behind the “old Europe” in terms of GDP. Therefore, a lot can be accomplished in raising overall living standards in the region, which will in turn increase healthcare investments available for each nation.

Novo Nordisk is dedicated to continuing a joint dialogue with authorities on what can be achieved from the perspective of well-being of people, by offering access to innovative products in areas which are global problems for modern societies – like diabetes.

The time is now to establish solid link between the short and long-term investments and savings yielded within the healthcare systems. In many cases, short term investments will lead to long term savings and this is especially true regarding diabetes, a chronic and progressive disease. In fact, studies conducted on the life-cycle cost of diabetes in the region show that in average, the initial cost of treatment represents 7 to 13 percent of the overall diabetes treatment, while the cost of complications represents the remaining share. We tend to discuss only about this 7 to 13

percent, while much bigger savings can be achieved if we treat our patients in the best possible way so they prevent or delay long term complications of diabetes.

Novo Nordisk is renowned for its world-class treatments in diabetes care, though also has an impressive range of products in haemophilia, hormone therapy and obesity. What are the key growth drivers in Eastern Europe?

All areas within our portfolio have shown encouraging growth, but the main driver remains diabetes care, as we are the worldwide leader in this field and it represents roughly 65 percent of our revenues.

Moreover, we are very excited to enter in the obesity therapeutic area, and Novo Nordisk has extremely powerful molecules to help manage this disease. We will soon launch a product in this therapeutic area. Nevertheless, this chronic disease is very complex and requires drastic changes in approach; it is a long journey for us and the patients and we witness many unmet needs for people with obesity. Furthermore, we are looking forward to commencing cooperation with the medical community in this area.

The company globally has exciting star products, Tresiba® and Victoza®. What have been the advancements to achieve reimbursement of these treatments in Poland?

Novo Nordisk has very powerful data demonstrating the amazing efficacy of Victoza® towards blood glucose levels, while equally providing a notable reduction in the risk of cardiovascular events. We have managed to prove that Victoza® is cost-effective and will continue dialogue with authorities on solutions how to bring this innovation to patients in Poland.

The Polish payer’s concern is based around price in the short term perspective. As aforementioned – our goal is to demonstrate the longer-term impact on healthcare system sustainability via valuable return on investment.

What is Novo Nordisk specifically doing to integrate themselves into the Polish healthcare ecosystem?

We have been running programs supporting diabetes and haemophilia healthcare in Poland for many years. For example, we have been working with patient associations on diabetes prevention as it is a very complex disease and education is key to addressing the issue. Two years ago, we commenced a school program that teaches children on the importance of a healthy lifestyle in order to prevent the epidemic of diabetes that we see globally. Investing in the new generation is the best investment for future healthcare and correlates with our long-term approach.

Moreover, Novo Nordisk has for a long time been committed to running clinical trials with innovative molecules in Poland – which is also part of healthcare ecosystem, with the engagement of doctors as investigators and nurses as study coordinators. At present, we are expanding significantly our portfolio of clinical trials and accordingly, we are currently doubling the size of our clinical team in Poland, as all our clinical activities are kept in-house.

How important is social awareness for Novo Nordisk?

Very important! It is in the genes of Novo Nordisk and all our employees. Internally, our employees are not only financially and economically responsible, but also accountable for the local society in which we operate. A case in point is our contribution after the heavy flooding in the Balkans, three years ago. We contributed financially, but above all, we genuinely wanted to help the community and engaged ourselves. The entire Eastern European management team assisted in the rebuild, an essential step for doctors to offer their services and treat outpatients in local clinic.

How do you ensure that the concept of the ¨Novo Nordisk Way" is truly embodied by your employees?

The "Novo Nordisk Way" is not a value we claim for promotion – we truly live it. I believe this is a distinguishing factor for Novo Nordisk as; above all, we are a genuine part of the society and want to actively participate toward improving health. It is not only about offering treatment solutions, but equally collaborating with all key stakeholders and engaging with the community. This is what makes me very proud to work for Novo Nordisk and drives my personal mission of helping people live a better life.

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