

Interview: Claude Broudic - General Manager, Servier, Serbia



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Claude Broudic, general manager for Servier in Serbia, highlights the potential for business in the country, Servier's projects for expansion in the Balkans, and the skills needed to put together a good pharma team.

What were your priorities when you took over as general manager of Servier Serbia?

My first priority was to implement an organization and a team to face all challenges and to seize opportunities.

We first recruited experienced managers to strengthen the team. Then, we enlarged the team in order to be present in all regions of Serbia. Over the last two years, we have doubled the size of the team and altogether have succeeded two years in a row in making Servier the fastest growing innovative company in the Serbian pharmaceutical market.

The main challenge lay in market access, with few innovative products reimbursed. For example, we have been waiting for reimbursement since 2011 for one of the group's innovations in heart failure, whereas this product is reimbursed in all other countries in the region where Servier is present.

While waiting for the reimbursement of our innovations, we decided to strengthen ourselves in hypertension, our field of expertise in Serbia. With a majority of patients not controlled, we

launched new fixed-dose combinations in order to simplify the life of patients with products that are highly effective in reducing blood pressure and that provide greater comfort, as patients take fewer pills per day.

How did you react to the pharma problems of 2014?

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Like many other pharmaceutical companies, we have faced strong price pressure that threaten our profitability. Despite the bleak economic climate in pharma at the time, we took the decision to develop the way in which we promote our products in Serbia by adapting to healthcare organizations and starting to educate family doctors, the first and main contact of patients.

Of course, we continued to visit specialists, as they help family doctors unable to manage alone.

In addition, and to complete our full management of the key stakeholders in the field of hypertension, we have increased our coverage of pharmacies in order to inform them about the added value of Servier's drugs, especially the over-the-counter products that they can recommend to patients.

Do you feel that there is reluctance to reimburse because of financial restrictions?

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Serbia is still developing pharmacoeconomic models for reimbursement of products. The price of drugs should not be the only criterion for reimbursement of innovative products. It is also necessary to consider the savings made because patients are taking innovative drugs that avoid hospitalizations and prevent disease worsening. To compare Serbia with other countries in the region, the Association of Innovative Producers (INOVIA) conducted a survey in 2017 to find out which products registered in Europe since 2010 have been reimbursed in Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Italy. Only 22 products were reimbursed in the past seven years! Whereas Bulgaria, for example, put three times more products on the reimbursement list. This figure goes some way to explain the poor market access experienced in this region.

There are, however, some positive signs. The state has recently said that it is willing to include all the WHO's essential products on the reimbursement list until 2020.

Would you like to see improvements in the conversations between the government and the private and public sectors?

For the past two years, collaboration has been much better, and the situation has improved. We are now able to meet together, to discuss our issues.

With the implementation of a new agreement between companies and the national health insurance program in order to give access to innovative drugs, we hope that it will be the beginning of a constructive collaboration for the benefit of Serbian patients to have access to the best treatment solutions.

How does Servier compare to other companies in the market?

Servier is an international and independent pharmaceutical company governed by a non-profit foundation, with no capital, which guarantees the group's capacity for long-term investment. This makes Servier different from all other pharmaceutical companies. The group is committed to therapeutic progress to serve patient needs with the help of health care professionals. The group's capital is human, not financial, with more than 21,000 talented people in 148 countries.

What components will drive growth in Serbia?

Growth will come with innovative products meeting a clear unmet need for Serbian patients and helping doctors and pharmacists to provide relief from diseases like hypertension, which affects one in two adults in Serbia and is one of the main causes of cardiovascular death. That's why Servier reinvests 25 percent of its total revenue (excluding generics) in research and development, and all profits are used for further development.

Our treatments demonstrate our ability to innovate, but also to produce qualitative drugs. We provide high-quality therapies to 94 million patients treated daily with our products worldwide. 95 percent of Servier drugs are synthesized in France; we have 15 production sites from which 617 million boxes were sent all over the world last year.

It is Servier's ambition to enable every patient in Serbia to have access to our drugs. For this, we need to have better market access by enabling the reimbursement of innovative products. This is a serious challenge in Serbia. Even though the time to market is unpredictable, we are working very closely with the authorities, and we are already seeing some positive outcomes. Last year, local authorities added innovative products on the list for the first time since 2011 and this, we hope, is the first of many.

All this would not be possible without a team of experienced and talented people committed to therapeutic progress to serve patients' needs.

What was the rationale behind changing the company status and establishing a distribution subsidiary?

Servier is building an organization for the next decade which will give us the right to sell products in Serbia and to promote our drugs to health care professionals.

When looking at the Balkan region, the Serbian pharmaceutical market is still underdeveloped and offers the most potential in terms of future development. Our population in Serbia is comparable to that of Bulgaria, but in terms of access to drugs and pharmaceutical expenditure per capita Serbia is still behind. That's why the group decided to increase its investments in Serbia, knowing that the current difficult market conditions will improve.

Where do you see Servier progressing in the Balkans?

Croatia and Slovenia are managed separately due to their EU membership.

With the support of the Serbian team, Servier started operations in Montenegro in 2011 thanks to a great collaboration with one of the local distributors. This year, we have also started to register our products in Albania.

With our ambition to increase our international footprint, we'd like to continue in the region by distributing our drugs in Kosovo in 2018.

How do you go about choosing the best people to work for Servier and how do you keep a good team in place?

Being a foundation with no shareholders, Servier's capital is not financial but human. Servier is becoming more attractive thanks, of course, to our successes, as in Serbia, but, more importantly, thanks to the group's values and long-term vision, which carries a lot of weight. The group's ambition is for employees to experience a long-term relationship of trust that encourages them to express their qualities and further develop their skills to best serve the patient's needs.

Besides skills, Servier is looking for women and men who believe in the same values of caring for each other, of growing together as a team, of finding innovative solutions. With such a culture in the team, each of us feels part of a project and understands that through our actions we help transmit to future generations a world that can ensure access to quality health care for all.

Finally, my advice to my colleagues around the world is to come and see Serbia with your own eyes. It deserves to be discovered. The past can be a little off-putting, but the people are passionate and proud, and the country is well worth a visit!

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