Interview: Wolfgang Wagner – Regional Director, EU and CEE Wörwag, Poland



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Dr. Wolfgang Wagner, regional director of Wörwag EU and CEE, highlights the ongoing process of the company to integrate itself within each respective healthcare community so patients can receive better market access to their biofactor therapies. Furthermore, he discusses the need to highlight the pharmacoeconomic impact of their products to key stakeholders, the potential of Poland for Wörwag moving forward, and the significance of the company's social responsibility towards the medical community and patients.

As the regional manager, how has the experience been thus far and what are your current challenges for the company in the region?

From a personal perspective, it is a position that requires a large amount of communication with different countries, people and cultures, a task that is extremely interesting for myself. Commercially, the strength of Wörwag has always been strongly based around business in Germany and Eastern Europe, including Belarus, Ukraine and Russia – markets where we have established a very strong market position.

My challenge is to bring together the mission of an EU company and integrate the culture of Eastern Europe, while maintaining the great family mindset of the company. This was done by implementing the company's 2015 strategy; "Getting closer, Helping better". This means bringing our products, which can be summarized as biofactors – vitamins, minerals, trace elements, key

phytotherapeutics – to the patients so they can improve their health status and live higher-quality lives.

This is done by being much closer to the markets and interacting on a higher level with the medical community in each respective country. We must show that the biofactors we provide are allowing patients to prevent disease, providing additional benefit to existing therapies and improving lives.

Have you been able to achieve this mission thus far?

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It is an ongoing process, not just a project. Therefore, this goal will never end, and we must be disciplined in everyday pushing to make this slogan a reality by undertaking numerous discussions with the relevant stakeholders. This is a challenge as many governments have differing opinions of biofactors and tend to believe sometimes this is only about a kind of balanced diet. Wörwag must demonstrate this is not the case for many patients with an illness or treatment that effects their vitamin and mineral health status.

What have been the growth drivers for the company in the region?

Along with the biofactors sector, we run a successful generics business, though this sector has faced many strong competitive pressures. Growing the company is extremely important for achieving high economies of scale you need for successfully competing in Generics markets. This is the key determining factor especially in nations that conduct public tenders, such as Germany.

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Our overall generics strategy is to focus on special areas that support our biofactors business. This is in diabetes, such as polyneuropathy, pain treatment, incorporating b-vitamins, and cognitive impairment. Many of these generics sectors have grown quite nicely. In Poland, it is slightly different as we focus mainly in biofactor brands, such as thiogamma® or milgamma®, that is offering great abilities to treating affected peripheral nerves.

How do you plan on growing the regional presence?

We are focusing on traditional brands based on sustainability, reliability and trust, as well as being well tolerated by our patients. Our aim is to expand our product reach, such as in a special Vitamin B product that has been very successful in Germany, and we now plan to bring it to our Eastern markets. Furthermore, we are looking to obtain increase our market share in magnesium therapies. Last year in Romania we witnessed great results in this area due to media campaigns, and we hope

to replicate this in other nations now.

What is the strategic importance of the region that you control?

It is more than half of the company's original business and overall growth. In the last three years we have experienced in this region double digit growth, and this will continue in the future. Of course, our business was under pressure in 2015 and 2016 due to currency devaluations in Ukraine and Russia, though taking this out, we have achieved great successes and this is helping to fund the company's further expansion.

In Poland, we have not fully achieved our previous results yet as obtaining market approval had been challenging in some cases. So far our portfolio is not as wide as in comparable markets, but in 2018/2019 this situation will improve quickly due to new launches and focussed business development.

What processes have you put in place to kick-start the company's influence in the Polish healthcare ecosystem?

We are very strong in classical sales and marketing to the healthcare community in Poland, though are lacking scope in regard to distribution; therefore, this is our strong focus and we have recently founded a Polish society and are currently setting up a wholesale business. This will allow Wörwag to offer more services for our distribution partners, such as the wholesalers and pharmacies, in turn increasing Wörwag's products geographical reach and speed to the market. Furthermore, we aim to launch several new products in the Polish market over the upcoming years.

For the company's products, especially in diabetes care, it is important to demonstrate short term costs for long term savings. How do you portray this to the key polish stakeholders?

First and foremost, it is important to see the situation of diabetics, as the probability of developing diabetic neuropathy in their lifetime is in around 60 percent of patients. If they are not treated correctly, their situational circumstance can go south very quickly and lead to complications such as amputations, an economic issue for overall society. Wörwag's biofactors have the potential to dropping this numbers significantly and helping patients live healthier lives, thus saving society money in the long run.

Our job now is to provide pharmacoeconomic data on the Polish market to the key Polish stakeholders, and in turn this will help in obtaining greater market access of our high-quality treatments.

What do you see as the potential for Poland in the future?

Poland offers incredible business opportunities as we see the huge market share we have in Eastern Europe. Furthermore, Poland has a stable legal system, a growing economy and is a nation where we can rely on EU law. German products are well respected and received in Poland for their reliability, and we are very confident we can take advantage of this key market in the future.

Wörwag is a company that is very prominent in social awareness campaigns. What initiatives are you most proud of throughout the region?

Firstly, we are a fighting for the awareness of neurological disorders and other side effects of diabetes together with the medical communities especially in Hungary and Romania. Wörwag Pharma Romania is strongly supporting the Society for podiatry, in Hungary we helped the Foundation of many neuropathy centres for improving the professional diagnosis of diabetic polyneuropathy. Supported also by commencing these initiatives several years ago, we have witnessed remarkable decreases in amputation rates and surgical issues due to diabetes in these countries.

Secondly, we began a movement in Germany called “Listen to your feet”. We are raising awareness among diabetes patients for diabetic neuropathy, and ensuring they understand the importance of being professionally examined.

These are just some of our successful campaigns, and we want to have this presence felt in all our markets. In Poland we are aiming to socially integrate ourselves further with key stakeholders and associations as our market presence grows.

What are your aspirations for the company in the region over the next three years?

We want to be market leader in all the nations we are present in our speciality indications of diabetic neuropathy, and for magnesium, zinc and B Vitamins such as B1 and B12. Furthermore, we want to establish further our additional services for the patient and the society and develop a network throughout Europe that supports education in all our nations. Also, we want to grow our media presence in each respective market.

You have a long history in the pharmaceutical industry and have now been working at Wörwag for over four years. What is the great thing about working for a family-based company?

At Wörwag you feel part of the decision-making process, and an integral member of the company and its strategy. They are always willing to listen to ideas and you feel more than just a tool being

directed by HQ, but a major part of something larger. Additionally, the family is always open to discuss business suggestions, and most importantly, they are happy to build the company’s social responsibility. It is an inspiring and exciting place to work.

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