Interview: Raimundas Voishka – Country Manager Baltics and Belarus, Pfizer



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Raimundas Voishka, country manager Lithuania and Belarus at Pfizer, highlights the increasing openness of the Baltic region towards innovation and stresses the commitment of Pfizer to bringing innovative as well as added-value medicines to the region.

You have more than 20 years of experience in the Lithuanian pharmaceutical industry. What would you highlight as the most significant change on the Lithuanian pharmaceutical market over the last recent years?

Lithuanian patients have better access to innovative treatments in comparison to the past. Indeed, in 2012 Lithuania was second to last in the country rankings for access to innovate treatments in Europe and now, even though it is still lagging behind the European Union average, Lithuania is more aligned with the situation in its neighbouring countries in Central Europe. This progress certainly deserves recognition but there is still a long way to go. Looking ahead, I remain positive since local authorities are eager to cooperate with the industry in order to make innovative drugs more accessible to the Lithuanian population.

Pfizer has been in Lithuania since 1995 and you were the one in charge of opening the affiliate. How would you describe this entrepreneurial experience at the forefront of Pfizer's operations since its inception in the country?

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Throughout all these years, we have managed to bring many new therapies and cures to patients that were unattended in the past. In this sense, I am delighted to share that Pfizer Lithuania has a similar level of offering to other leading markets such as Spain and France – I believe that our product portfolio defines Pfizer's success in Lithuania. As a consequence, I am highly satisfied with the current positioning of the affiliate in Lithuania and it reflects the ambitions that I had by that time.

Globally Pfizer is the number one pharma company in terms of sales, but in Lithuania you rank sixth. How can you explain this discrepancy and what has been the company's strategy to catch up?

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Firstly, the history of Pfizer in the country is relatively short in comparison to that in other countries in which the company's products have been available for many years. The late arrival of Pfizer in Lithuania is mainly due to historical reasons since the country was quite closed to foreign companies but, as soon as the gates were opened, Pfizer entered the country. Since then, we have been mainly focused on bringing innovative and high added value medicines to the market and this product portfolio strategy, in combination with a high quality team, is the main reason for the current positioning of Pfizer as one of the leading players in the Lithuanian market.

From a regional perspective, what is the strategic relevance of the Lithuanian affiliate within the Baltics region?

Pfizer holds a leading position amongst all the Baltic States, as it does in Lithuania. Everything that we do in each country is for the sake of the patients, finding the best way to get the needed treatment on time. In fact, putting patients at the center of our operations is our motto beyond any market. Thus, even though Lithuania is the largest country amongst the Baltic States, all three countries hold the same relevance since, at the end, it is about serving patients.

What are the commonalities amongst the Baltic States?

From our sector perspective, there are many commonalities since the healthcare system in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia has gone through similar reforms and their systems are more or less at the same development stage. Additionally, all three States are part of the EU, which has sped up regulatory homogenization.

As a consequence, we have a very similar strategy for launching drugs in these three countries. In this sense, we partner with the local healthcare authorities in order to define the best as well as

fastest way to bring innovative treatments to market in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia.

Furthermore, it is a reality that these three states are trying to be perceived and act as a block rather than individual countries. In my opinion, this approach is quite attractive for multinational companies since, individually, the Baltic States are small countries but as a block can be considered a sizeable market.

Considering Pfizer's portfolio, in which therapeutic areas are you strongly positioned in the country?

We are quite strong in key national burdens such as oncology and cardiovascular diseases. On top of that, I have to stress that we also experience interesting growth in other areas such as LOE therapies.

The Lithuanian government is struggling to find budget to provide patients with the best innovative medicines. How would you evaluate the Baltics' market access environment and its openness to innovation?

Currently, in terms of access to innovative treatments, Estonia is the country that is leading the region. Nevertheless, I believe that Lithuania will catch up in the next two years as a consequence of the new National Drugs Policy approved by the Ministry of Health last August 2017, which still is a very general document with scarce clear objectives as well as tasks rather than simply declarations but it is certainly a progress.

Having said that, it needs to be stressed that patients' access is one of the main hurdles in this region and, concretely, innovations are still coming late to the Baltic States. I believe that Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia should advance towards the same direction building up a common language that will enhance the patients' access to the latest treatments based on accurate planning, solid forecasting and efficient resources' management.

How is the industry in general helping the government to advance in this regard?

Pfizer is helping local authorities through organizing round tables and conferences in which knowledge as well as expertise that we have acquired in other markets is shared. I believe that this type of interaction helps local authorities to identify and implement locally best practices that have been already developed in other markets.

Clinical trials are one of the main investment areas for innovative pharma multinationals in Lithuania. As a global innovative leader, what is the footprint of Pfizer

in this regard?

Pfizer significantly invests in clinical research in Lithuania but also in the Baltic region; being positioned as one of the strongest players in this front. That being said, the high quality as well as speed of clinical research in the region are two of the main selling points that position the Baltic region as a great destination for such type of investments.

The size of the Lithuanian market is small and with certain regulatory instability, especially regarding pricing. Why in these conditions do you feel innovative companies should pay more attention to Lithuania?

Lithuania, as its Baltic neighbors, is becoming more and more open to innovative medicines being a clear priority of the local government. Consequently, while other more mature markets are struggling to offer growth to companies, leading pharma players with innovative added value solutions will find profitable opportunities to market their solutions here.

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