

Interview: Leonardo Maffioli - Senior Marketing and Commercial Manager Fertility and Endocrinology, IBSA



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Leonardo Maffioli, senior marketing and commercial manager of the fertility and endocrinology division of IBSA, discusses the story of IBSA Poland and the potential of the Polish market for the company. Furthermore, he highlights the market challenges of the country, especially for fertility treatments during a period of a conservative government and gives an overview of the future aspirations for IBSA Poland.

Could you introduce yourself to our international audience as well as the most recent milestones of the markets you control?

I have 15 years' experience in the pharmaceutical industry and I have been working at IBSA for seven years in the marketing and commercial sector. My current role is senior marketing and commercial manager in the fertility and endocrinology division, as well as being directly involved with the affiliates of Scandinavia, Turkey and Poland.

In each respective market I control, we have reached some notable achievements over recent times. In Scandinavia, in the last two years, we set up the affiliate and thus far have witnessed encouraging growth. In Turkey, three years ago we sold our one-millionth hormone pack, and last year we managed to sell our 1.5 millionth. Finally, in Poland, we have been able to successfully obtain registration for our products within the fertility field and are constantly enlarging our portfolio, expanding our offering into the therapeutic area of urology.

What is the story of IBSA in Poland?

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IBSA Poland was set up in 2011 and we are present within two niche areas of care – fertility and urology. When setting up the affiliate we decided to primarily focus on the sales and marketing of our products. Hence, all our other services, such as legal, distribution, imports and accounting, are outsourced. In the last seven years, since 2011, we have seen our sales increase more than three-fold, from 30 thousand packs annually, to roughly 100 thousand packs per annum.

Looking ahead, the future is two-fold for IBSA Poland. On one side, we are looking to invest further into our two niche areas – on the other hand – in the medium term we want to branch out into other therapeutic areas of care. This will further stimulate our encouraging growth and help us to reach the full potential offered by the Polish healthcare market.

What are the other sectors that are most promising for IBSA in Poland?

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If you look at IBSA's global sales, they are split roughly around 30 percent for pain and inflammation, 30 percent for human reproduction, 30 percent for rheumatology, and the remaining ten percent for the other remaining areas. We believe that pain and inflammation is a sector that offers excellent opportunities for IBSA in Poland.

What are the exciting products in pain and inflammation you believe will be a success in Poland?

One of IBSA's star global product line is Flector®; non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAID). We believe that this has the potential of being Poland's flagship product within the field of pain and inflammation.

What are the main obstacles IBSA has faced when gaining market entry for its products in Poland?

Initially it was not overly challenging, and in general it was a standard procedure to have products registered in Poland. In 2013, the new ministerial program for human reproduction was set-up and, one-year later reimbursement of the drugs in this area was introduced.

Lately, the situation has become tougher as human reproduction is being looked at differently by the current Polish government which is considered to have more conservative views than previous

Polish governments. The Ministerial programme has been suspended and negotiations with the Ministry of Health are now more complex – nevertheless – compared to 2011, the situation is considerably better as our products are reimbursed. The field of fertility in Poland is not reaching its full potential, especially if compared to most European countries.

What steps can be done to promote further the fertility segment in Poland?

The main step is the reintroduction of the Ministerial programme which would substantially increase the number of cycles performed. This would bring Poland closer to the levels of IBSA's main markets.

Many nations are always looking for lower drug pricing. IBSA has large operations in Switzerland, and this ensures treatment prices always remain relatively high. How sustainable is this business model in the future?

Every country has room for higher and lower priced drugs, and IBSA operates heavily in Switzerland, which brings about a relatively expensive human field force and production cost. Nevertheless, the key attributes of the Swiss pharmaceutical industry – high quality, safety and efficacy – will always be valued, and IBSA will continue to have key processes in Switzerland, capitalising on the premium price tag.

What products within the areas of fertility and endocrinology are you excited about?

We have strong and well-established Follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH) and human menopausal gonadotropin (hMG) products for the ART programmes. In 2015 we launched our sub-cutaneous Progesterone product, Prolutex®, the first aqueous solution for luteal phase support – with great results. In early 2019 we plan to launch a human chorionic gonadotropin (hCG) treatment, which will complete our fertility product portfolio and allow IBSA to be even more competitive.

Concerning endocrinology, we have a star product called Tirosint®, the first and only levothyroxine soft gel cap, free of gluten and lactose. This is commercialised worldwide, from the US to Greece, and we are hoping in the future to bring it to Poland, though it is still not registered here; therefore, this is a medium to long-term goal.

Many companies have larger operations in Poland, especially in the field of clinical trials. What potential is there for IBSA to ramp up activity here?

Within human reproduction, our Polish sales and marketing team is in close contact with all IVF clinicians and gynaecologists, and there are plans to conduct local studies in the future.

How does IBSA interact with the wider medical community, and act as a leader, especially within the field of human reproduction?

On an international level, and in Poland, we are focused on symposia, conferences, congresses and last but not least stand-alone summits on reproductive medicine, though less centred on promotion of our products, and more on educational programs as this is what the scientific community needs. This means the overall medical field is slowly becoming better versed in the area of fertility and are very aware of IBSA and our products.

What is the potential for IBSA Poland in the future?

The potential for human reproduction is dependent on the reimbursement systems and the overall perception throughout Poland of this healthcare area. This will be built through the aforementioned educational activities at congresses and by fertility societies, as well as contributing to local clinical studies

Moving into other therapeutic areas we face a challenge: the initial investment is, in fact, quite large and, therefore, it is a matter of IBSA weighing up the risk against the reward.

Moving forward, what are the aspirations for IBSA Poland?

In the medium-term, we plan to have a fully integrated affiliate, like in other countries throughout the region, and to be present in at least four therapeutic areas.

What perception is IBSA as the company's footprint continues to grow?

IBSA is strong in social and environmental responsibilities and boasts three separate foundations; IBSA foundation for children, IBSA foundation for scientific research and IBSA Foundation for employees. Furthermore, we are looking at the long-term and have published a sustainability report in 2015 and will release the 2017 report in the near future.

What is it about working at IBSA, a mid-sized company, that you enjoy most?

Firstly, I love the social aspect of the company. Secondly, IBSA gives me the opportunity to work in different aspects and I never get bored! This, compared to larger organizations, gives room for ideas, and allows all IBSA employees to have an open mind and be an integral part in growing the company.

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