

Interview: Martin Dufour - President & CEO, Nadurel Pharma, Canada



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Nadurel

Pharma, headquartered in the technopole of Saint-Hyacinthe, Quebec, promotes natural health products complete with concrete clinical trial evidence. Martin Dufour, President and CEO, has been at the helm since 2013, over which time he has introduced the European known GeloMyrtol® and come across challenges in promoting natural health, while using his experience at Sanofi to build his own business.

Can you please introduce Nadurel Pharma and your own professional record to our international readers?

My career in pharmaceuticals began back in 1992 when I started out as a pharmaceutical representative for Sanofi. During my time with the French company, I learnt the tricks of the pharmaceutical trade, working my way up from sales representative to hold positions in marketing, business development and mergers and acquisitions. The final strand to my career at Sanofi focalized on life cycle management and new product launches. This is when I realized I had the ideas, the business knowledge and experience to launch my own company, which I did in 2010.

Nadurel Pharma straddles the pharmaceuticals and nutraceuticals market, commercializing natural products that are backed up by proven clinical evidence. Clinical evidence is absolutely crucial to the salability and promotion of our portfolio and one of the core principles of Nadurel Pharma's

strategy. Without clinical evidence, it is near impossible to convince healthcare professionals or pharmacists of the value of products. Indeed, we learned this through trialing a series of products without clinical evidence and struggled to promote them effectively throughout the healthcare value chain and have since learnt the clout that clinical evidence carries. That said, even with clinical evidence, circumstances dictate that bringing natural products to market is challenging, and we dedicate time to convincing people of the real and tangible benefits to our products.

Fundamentally, the premise of our products is to build brands off the back of clinical evidence and marketing. The importance of brand building and awareness cannot be understated; with natural products we lack patents and compensate with a strong brand image. To build a strong brand and brand image, we require healthcare professionals' and patients' involvement and approval. Patient loyalty often comes through physician recommendation and this circle of contact is what creates brand trust. To explain, we signal the effectiveness of our products to healthcare professionals who, after examination, prescribe our products to their patients for treatment. The advantage of this route to market is that healthcare professionals are equipped with the expertise necessary to match our products with the right patients.

What was the decision process you went through when building the Nadurel Pharma portfolio?

While working with Sanofi, I became familiar with Pohl Boskamp, a German company, and their products such as Nitrolingual, which Sanofi distributed in Canada on their behalf. The product that most interested me in Pohl Boskamp's portfolio, however, was GeloMyrtol® which was not part of the Sanofi portfolio.

Pohl Boskamp realized my interest in the product and approached me during the early days of Nadurel Pharma's operations. Following negotiation, we were successful in bringing GeloMyrtol® to the Canadian market. It was a great first product to collaborate on, and our promotion of GeloMyrtol® in Canada resulted in a win-win situation for the both Pohl Boskamp and Nadurel Pharma. Pohl Boskamp, as a private family-owned company, found in its partnership with us, a budding, small and local pharmaceutical company that had the time to get to know the product, and muster true dedication and loyalty to its promotion. Nadurel Pharma on the other hand, saw a product enter our portfolio that complimented our expanding natural portfolio which already featured calcium and omega tablets. Our partnership with Pohl Boskamp actually represents the first time in Pohl Boskamp's history, they signed a long-term contract: a 20-year agreement to partner with us, permitting us to import the product from Germany.

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Initially, Nadurel Pharma had a portfolio focus on calcium, Omega-3 and probiotics. Probiotics is another strain that interests us due to the change in their perception; now more and more clinical evidence exists touting the benefits of probiotics and their potential in avoiding prescription of unnecessary drugs. A similar trend is observable with Omega-3. To date, over 60,000 patients have performed randomizing clinical trials to prove its effectiveness, and we intend to spread the message that the fatty acid is effective. Unfortunately, it is poorly understood across the life sciences sector, that regularly supplementing Omega-3 can lead to a 52 percent reduction in cardiovascular problems.

What is the scope of Nadurel's presence in Canada today?

We orient ourselves predominantly to the Quebec market, where 85 percent of our turnover comes from, while the remaining 15 percent stem from Ontario. Our next phase, having well and truly secured the Quebec market, is to expand into Ontario by acquiring more capital. Expansion in further provinces constitutes our long-term goal, we will however be careful to expand one step at a time, as it is important to keep building and maintaining our strong brand image. Ultimately, we plan to expand to the US but the market is ten times the size of Canada's and the cost is comparatively higher. Thus, the time frame we are considering for the expansion south of the boarder is of five years.

Natural health products and alternatives are increasingly popular not just in Canada, but worldwide. How would you assess the natural health trend in Canada?

The trend is certainly evolving and catching on, particularly due to the increased focus on 'healthy living' in Western societies. Big Pharma are aware of the rising interest and often come knocking at our door, looking for expertise. There is clearly a bright future for natural health products and I am excited to see where the trend leads.

Patients are increasingly turning to natural health products because they are more and more aware of the alternatives to chemical products, antibiotics for instance. As antimicrobial resistance is on the rise, the importance of natural health products is gaining momentum in the social mindset, in Canada and elsewhere.

However, we do come across hurdles in the expansion of the natural health market whether it be patenting products or clinical evidence. In the natural health world, it is difficult to patent products and the process can be costly. Finding and marketing products with strong clinical evidence is

tricky given the rarity of clinical trials and the capital required to make clinical trials happen.

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How do you go about increasing awareness of natural health products in Canada?

For healthcare professionals, we organize conferences, lunch-and-learns, and networking events to promote our products' benefits. We would like to emulate the efforts of companies who develop CME (continuing medical education) programs.

From a patient's standpoint, we communicate with physicians and pharmacists to discuss new trends and figures and ensure it is relayed to the patients. We try to propose reliable information alternatives to sources such as the internet, where tremendous amounts of information can be found, of which large parts can be extremely misleading. Building CMEs for patients is a good way of combatting this, but it is costly due to the size of the project. We use healthcare professionals' knowledge and networks to educate patients, while investing in DTC (direct-to-consumer) campaigns, whether it be through radio or internet media.

With increased reimbursement, we would be able to further expand our operations, but convincing provinces of the value of natural health at this early stage is a challenge. Nonetheless, we observe positive steps in the direction of reimbursement, Quebec for example has added calcium to its reimbursement list. Overall, our strategy is to enter reimbursement lists, thus leveraging on the fight against antibiotic resistance, while at the same time contributing to it.

What are your key priorities over the coming years?

We intend to work on increasing access to capital and to grow our business in Quebec, to expand to Ontario and launch new and exciting products. We are excited to expand and are ready for the challenges we face in evolving. More capital to be able to take on the four-month lead-time, the regulatory pathways and filing would be needed as we would like to introduce more Pohl Boskamp products to Canada. We will further work to build more strategic partnerships when introducing new brands to the market, as we rely on an outsourced sales force model to increase efficiency.

Looking back at your beginnings as an entrepreneur, what shout out would you give to yourself from where you stand today?

I knew that starting a business was going to be tricky, but I did not expect it to be as time-consuming or challenging! The cost of entry is very high here and I learnt quickly that you must overestimate business process prices at all times. Although my first financial round of capital raising was successful I was quickly faced with limited resources again. My advice would thus be:

always plan for more!

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