

Interview: Marzena Kulis - Managing Director, Johnson & Johnson Medical Devices Central and Eastern Europe



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Marzena Kulis, managing director of Johnson & Johnson Medical Devices CEE, highlights the importance of the region and Poland within J&J Medical Devices, and the impact of increasing healthcare expenditures on the medical device market. Additionally, she highlights the main challenges encountered by innovative companies and the extensive educational campaigns being run by J&J Medical Devices to advance Polish healthcare.

You have been in the role for nearly 3 years. On that note, what is the mandate of your position?

I am the managing director of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) for J&J Medical Devices, that consists of the three strongest pillars: general surgery, orthopaedics, and cardiovascular and specialty products. The CEE region covers 19 countries, from the Baltics in the north to the Balkans in the south, also including Ukraine and Malta, with markets inside and outside the EU.

Furthermore, the CEE zone entails 17 languages and 13 different currencies, so it is a highly diverse and interesting region to manage.

The medical device sector is fascinating, and prior to working here it was completely unknown to me. Prior my role at J&J Medical Devices, I was general manager of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as market access lead in Poland for Pfizer. I also held a public-sector position at the World Bank, working on healthcare reforms in the CEE and worked as an academic in Krakow. Medical devices were really the last piece of the puzzle.

From my perspective, the medical device market is a rapidly developing and dynamic market, bringing great innovation for the benefit of the healthcare systems and the patients.

Globally, J&J Medical experienced 8.7 percent growth in Q4 in 2017 compared to 2016. How have these results been translated throughout the CEE region?

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The company is doing very well in the medical device sector throughout the world, and the CEE contributes to these great results. We have achieved consecutive years of growth in the region, and growth rates vary from market to market, depending on many factors such as development of the healthcare system, overall economic situation, and many others. Overall, the CEE zone is one of the leading emerging market regions for the company and we are important in J&J Medical Devices' global footprint.

In respect to Poland, it is a market with a large population and is constantly developing at many levels. At the same time, there are many unmet medical needs here in general surgery, orthopaedics and cardiovascular fields; therefore, Poland represents a major opportunity and is one of the top priorities for us in the region.

The company has quite a diverse portfolio. What have been the growth drivers in in Poland?

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Our electrophysiology business unit, as well as the orthopaedic branch of J&J Medical Devices Poland is achieving good results. The surgical arm of the company has equally witnessing good growth, so in all three pillars we are on the way up and showing promising signs for the future.

J&J Medical Devices is a leading innovative medical device company and recently has been active in acquisitions. How quickly do this global movements trickle down to Poland?

Of course, Poland is considered a developed nation overall, though within healthcare we are still considered an emerging market. Therefore, the pace at which new products come to the market is perhaps slower than in the rest of the EU. The innovation we introduce to the Polish healthcare ecosystem is tailored to the specific needs of Polish patients and fits the service requirements of the Polish market.

What the main challenges that innovative medical device companies have encountered in Poland?

One of the most important concepts Poland needs to understand is that bringing a cost-effective solution is not necessarily and always the cheapest option, there is more to this concept than just the individual price per product unit. To give you an example, the treatment of complications in surgery can be much more expensive than the price a medical product that has a potential, if

properly used, to reduce these complications. The challenge for innovative medical device companies, and a priority of ours, is to deliver this message to the key decision makers. Furthermore, this pharmacoeconomic approach is not only in the long-term, as cost efficiency can easily be solved by introducing a quicker treatment for a health condition.

What J&J Medical Devices is seeking is not only present our own products but provide a more holistic view that involves the key decision makers from all levels, from the MOH to hospitals. This will ensure purchasing decisions are made based on arguments such as health outcome or overall value. In this manner, healthcare needs are addressed in a cost-efficient matter and patients receive the best treatment possible.

The Polish medical device market stands at around 3 billion USD and is expected to rise in parallel with the governments planned increase in healthcare expenditure. What do you see as the potential for the Polish market in the future?

Poland's move to kick-start an increase in healthcare spending is a critical step and looking ahead gives us a positive outlook. Nevertheless, Poland still falls behind in certain indicators; for example, in joint replacement and other surgical procedures, per capita, Poland has some of the lowest numbers in the EU.

Nevertheless, the first step to bring Poland closer to the healthcare standard of the rest of the EU, is the Polish government's move to increase the GDP percentage being spent on public healthcare. Though, reviewing other indicators, such as the European consumer healthcare index, Poland is one of the last countries in terms of patient satisfaction from healthcare, and despite the economy now reaching the 8th position in Europe, it is time the healthcare system also catches up as well.

Education is a key step for medical device companies. What innovative approach in this area does J&J Medical Devices bring compared to other players?

This is the area I am most proud of during my time at J&J, because providing on-going professional education to the medical community is as important as the product itself.

We are not solely bringing the knowledge of the medical devices we offer, but we are changing the entire paradigm of a certain disease's care by offering programs that cut across the entire specialty, in sectors such as spine surgery, orthopaedics and general surgery. We give a holistic, full 360-degree picture approach and give the medical community an opportunity to completely revolutionise and develop care within their therapeutic area. Education is an integral part of what J&J Medical Devices does and is always an ongoing process we look to constantly improve.

As a leading company in the medical device sector, and a part of the global leader in health care, how is J&J Medical interacting to be an integral part of furthering medical device awareness in Poland?

On a personal level, I am an active voice externally from J&J Medical Devices, being the Vice-chairwoman at POLMED; the Polish medical-device industry association. This allows me to share the position of the company as well as help advance and find solutions for the entire Polish medical device environment. At POLMED, I am part of the team that is analysing the Polish market and attempting to identify the aspects that need to be improved to ensure a more efficient and patient friendly environment.

As a company, J&J Medical Devices is very much active in defining certain positions for the entire industry and bringing valuable knowledge to the market. Through our educational activities, and overall involvement, we can lead the way in regard to healthcare compliance within the medical device industry, especially when it comes to adhering to the medical device code of business practice.

Where do you want to lead the CEE region in the next 3 years?

The CEE region I lead is extremely fascinating and there is a lot to learn and contribute, especially in less developed nations where we have only just started to enter. Furthermore, from a professional standpoint, I am always looking for opportunities to develop and I am driven by the challenges that lie ahead. Commercially, our overriding goal and next priority, is to drive forward the CEE to become the fastest growing cluster within the EMEA region.

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