Mario Sciberras – General Manager Cyprus, Malta and Gibraltar, GSK



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Mario Sciberras, former general manager for Malta and Gibraltar became general manager for Cyprus, Malta, and Gibraltar in 2016. In this interview, he touches on themes of transparency, GSK's positioning on the market and its vaccination strategy for the coming years.

What have been your main priorities since taking over the affiliate?

The primary focus is and has always been the people. Whatever sector of the business you occupy, the people individually and the team dynamics are fundamental to the success of the company. In the first six months of my extended role, the focus was ensuring that we have the right people on board, and secondary to that, was ensuring that these people have the right capabilities and the right motivation and engagement levels to ensure we have a high-performance team.

Importantly, concerning decision-making, this must be swift and decisive to ensure that we are prepared for the future. Currently, we have a team of 25 working on a daily basis, with future plans to grow. The affiliate was already long established upon my arrival, and we sought immediately to kickstart good business synergies across Cyprus and Malta which increased efficiencies and effectiveness.

What are the advantages of hosting an affiliate in Cyprus as opposed to working through a distributor?

We do also work with a third-party distributor; however, the affiliate is present here in Cyprus for a reason. We want to be in control of our future; therefore, we must be present on the ground employing local people with local insight that have a passion for the business. Being present in Cyprus creates a framework for a sustainable business rather than depending on a third-party–which may drive their interests.

GSK has three main lines of operations: pharma, vaccines and consumer health. How do these three departments perform in Cyprus?

The consumer division and pharma are separate and distinct divisions—although we are one unified GSK. My responsibility here is the pharma side: Rx plus vaccines; I cannot comment on consumer healthcare when it comes to performance other than to say that we have a healthy consumer business. With regards to pharmaceuticals and vaccines, we have a booming business thanks to innovation, mainly in vaccines, respiratory and HIV. Indeed, this has made an enormous difference to our business in the past two to three years and will continue to do so.

How is GSK adapting its activities to the upcoming system changes?

GSK is a crucial player in helping to shape the environment in Cyprus. As part of KEFEA, the research and development association, we have different workstreams that tackle vaccines, Rx, Brexit and serialization. We also invite stakeholders from other countries to share their expertise because the path we are treading with GeSY is not unique—other countries have created an excellent healthcare situation and patients in some countries have wider access to innovative medicines.

At GSK we are very active in setting up the right structure which allows wider access to innovative medicines for Cypriot patients. We also believe that we need to build a sustainable healthcare system.

What will be the key success factor for GSK in navigating this environment?

We are blessed in GSK because we have a wide portfolio, from anti-infectives to over 15 vaccines, and with an extensive portfolio plus a healthy pipeline the future system allows more growth opportunities than risks.

GSK would like to be a transparent company globally. How does this translate into the local landscape in Cyprus?

I have been with GSK for 22 years, and GSK is by far the leading company in the industry concerning values; not only in saying that we are but by exemplifying. We are patient-focused, and we do not want to even engage with the perception that we are in any way influencing a prescriber because they will receive something in return. We want our prescribers to understand the science and prescribe our products for their patients if appropriate based on the belief that our products are offering better value.

Having a high-performance team ensures that we can continue to win whilst maintain the highest industry standards. If we consider two football teams, country X and country Y, the latter not being very good, country X will find no need to commit fouls because they know they are a great team and can win without playing dirty. However, country Y may need to commit fouls and play in a 'grey zone' to upset the opposition. This analogy serves to underline how important it is to have good people, a good team, fantastic teamwork to ensure we play above board and continue to win in the interest of the patients and healthcare in general.

What similarities and differences do you find in managing Malta and Cyprus?

There are more similarities than differences, especially in the private and public sector markets. The Maltese private market is lucrative and represents half of the business, similar to Cyprus. Culturally, there are some minor differences, but overall the people on both islands are hard-working and assiduous. It is a pleasure to work in these countries because there are a lot of passionate people both in work and their personal life.

If we translate that passion into the work they do on a daily basis, it becomes easy to relate to these people especially when we have an excellent strategic vision.

What are the primary growth drivers over the years in Rx?

Namely, innovative drugs within pharma including and especially vaccines. This is crucial because, without innovation, your business is dead in the water. We are happy that roughly innovative medicines make up 30 percent of our total sales. Having such a high percentage is a good indicator, even from the European point of view of having a healthy successful business.

We see success in vaccines for the coming, where we have recently relaunched the meningitis B vaccine but at the same time we have grown the vaccine legacy piece ie the 'older' vaccines.

We are thrilled that we have had a good level of success with HIV drugs in the public sector. HIV patients in Cyprus can now benefit from our innovative medicines which offer good futures. One of the essential molecules is Dolutegravir which will form the basis of other medications coming

forward.

Respiratory is another key growth driver, and we are undoubtedly leaders in both Cyprus and Malta in this therapeutic area.

On the private market, we are in the top three pharmaceutical companies. If we consider the public plus private combined, we are one of the leaders.

What is your corporate social responsibility footprint?

There is a very high pro-vaccine mentality here in Cyprus, and we take our public health responsibility very seriously. As a company, we are committed to providing GAVI (the vaccines alliance) which is a public-private organization that has a shared goal of making sure that underused vaccines in smaller countries become mainstream. We are committed to providing more than 850 million vaccines at affordable prices to protect 300 million by the year 2024—this is a vast enterprise, and it is a logistical and manufacturing challenge. Ultimately, a business is not about just making profits, but it is about being an integral part of society, and in this case, humanity.

What are your objectives for GSK Cyprus in the next years?

We are looking forward to expanding the business, increasing our investment particularly in vaccines. We will look at more than just vaccinations for children but also for vaccination throughout life. In other parts of the business we want to continue to drive solid base that we already have and our sales force flexibility will enable us to achieve this in the coming years.

What is your personal goal for this affiliate?

For me, what is essential is that the team is successful, not only from a business point of view but ensuring that we have the right harmony and atmosphere amongst the group. I want people wanting and looking forward to come to work in the mornings with passion for the work that they do.

What is your final message?

Cyprus is on the verge of entering an exciting phase. Firstly, GeSY, will allow for an increased budget and will improve access to innovative drugs. Secondly, is the prospect of unification, which may offer a material unique prospect. Although I understand and appreciate that this is a sensitive and emotional issue from purely a business point of view the estimation is that billions will be injected into the system, a massive amount, providing businesses including pharmaceutical and

other great opportunities.

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