

Fabio Sperandei - Country Head, Sandoz Malaysia



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Fabio Sperandei has been the country head for Sandoz Malaysia for four years. Here, he explains the key success factors that led Sandoz to become the leading multinational generic company in Malaysia as well as the importance of a manager working closely with his team to achieve growth.

Could you tell us how has Sandoz's Malaysian affiliate been growing over the last four years?

I joined Sandoz Malaysia in 2014, having spent ten years in the Novartis group across four different countries. My first goal when arriving at the head of the affiliate was to expand our presence in the private sector, for example in private pharmacies, as well as our pre-existing presence in private hospitals. We were already present in the public sector by participating in government tenders and visiting general practitioners, but we had almost no presence in the private segment four years ago. After successfully implementing our strategy, we have managed to achieve a foothold. Our operations are also driven by therapeutical areas and our future pipeline. We aim to bring to Malaysian patients more difficult-to-make products and more specialized drugs in order to increase our impact on Malaysian society. Sandoz is committed to providing patients with high quality and affordable medicines.

Malaysia is a country where Novartis sees great potential due to the availability of diverse talent and strong market opportunities. Kuala Lumpur is one of the five Novartis Global Service Center

around the world, and part of Novartis Business Services organization which delivered a broad variety of services to the Novartis group of companies worldwide. Services offered by the NGSC Kuala Lumpur team includes IT, HR Services, FRA Operations and others. There are a lot of investments being put in the shared services centre and hundreds of Novartis employees are working in this global hub.

How would you explain the success of Sandoz affiliate in the country?

The current Sandoz performance is a result of a continuous focus on the quality of our products, our people, and our means of doing business which include following strict monitoring guidelines as well as our compliance level. Indeed, our team in Kuala Lumpur is composed of around 70 people in charge of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei. Sandoz believes in diversity and we are leveraging on our Malaysian talents' diversity to grow our operations. This is the only way we can reach the level of dynamism and out-of-the-box thinking demanded in the generic market. As a manager, I am also communicating directly with my team and ensuring that they are working with passion and motivation in Sandoz. Our team has a high level of commitment and I believe it is also the success factor for our affiliate.

How would you assess the appreciation for biosimilars in Malaysia?

There is strong interest from the authorities to invest in biosimilars. Companies that are entering this market are being welcomed with open arms. Sandoz being the leader worldwide for biosimilars, with several molecules registered in different continents and production facilities based in Europe, mainly in Austria and Slovenia, we are looking forward to bringing more biosimilars in the country. We currently have two biosimilar products on the market in Malaysia: Filgrastim, an oncology product enhancing white blood cells after chemotherapy, and Epoetin Alfa, used by nephrologists and dialysis centres. For the private market, they are on patient request by the doctor, but we are also seeking a national tender for Epoetin Alfa.

How can Sandoz and Novartis work with the government to address the sustainability of Malaysian healthcare?

The recent election results have shown that Malaysia is willing to embrace change. We hope that the Ministry of Health stays true to their promise of increasing the financing on healthcare. This will result in better outcomes for Malaysian patients.

Sandoz, as part of MAPS association, maintains a continuous dialogue with the Ministry of Health. We are also forming partnerships with local pharmaceutical companies in Malaysia, as well as bidding for national tenders so we can contribute to the success of the Ministry of Health by delivering high-quality medicines at an affordable price. In fact, Sandoz standards are identical to those of the other branches of Novartis.

Sandoz is one of the largest generic players globally. What is your position in the Malaysia generics market?

Sandoz is present in the market with a wide portfolio of products covering anti-infectives, CNS, cardiovascular, and men's health. Our products are composed of generics, branded generics, and originator brands. In 2018, we entered the oncology sector by launching two molecules: Permetrexed and Fludarabine. We have launched a CNS product, Pregabalin, and a respiratory product, Acetylcysteine. We aspire to launch a gastrointestinal product very soon, Pantoprazole tablets.

It is a long journey to make a product successful in Malaysia. It starts even before the product's entrance to the market as there are strict regulatory requirements which are good for patients, but it affects strongly company's timeline. On the market, there is a lot of generic competition as many companies are seeing the value of investing in Malaysia. In this context, both the Novartis group and Sandoz are outperforming the local market in 2018 and Sandoz is positioned between fourth and fifth in the local generic market when counting all generics players in Malaysia. We are also the leading multinational company for generics, leading in the therapeutic areas where we have a presence. Now, our challenge is to invest more in launching new products. Indeed, some of our competitors have three to four times the size of our current portfolio.

What are the therapeutic areas which you would like to enter or expand?

The main risk for a generics company is to enter a large number of therapeutic areas without any focus. We want to make a strong impact on Malaysian patients and ensure that our investments are helping us grow our presence and be stronger than our competition. Thus, we will prioritise

only three or four therapeutic areas. Our base portfolio was anti-biotics and anti-infectives and in the last few years, we expanded to cardiology. Our next step will be to refocus our attention towards oncology and CNS.

How could healthcare digitalisation aid the performance of Sandoz in the market?

Sandoz recently launched a global project, the *Sandoz Hack*, aiming to increase healthcare digitalisation in different countries. It is a very new concept for Novartis as a global company that was introduced during our annual meeting in Madrid last year. We had a meeting with the head of the Novartis group, who announced a willingness of Novartis to be a pioneer and leader in digital health with a common global strategy put in place. There already have been a number of successes around the world.

In Malaysia, I believe that it will be the future of the healthcare environment and as it is important, we have recruited a new manager in September responsible for driving the digital journey for Sandoz both in Malaysia and in Singapore. This will be a slow process, and we are not expecting results in 2019 but we want to start today to be successful tomorrow.

What are your priorities for the future?

Firstly, I hope to bring continuity by maintaining our image and representation in the market and with healthcare professionals. Our patients are important, so we want to ensure that their doctors are well informed about our products.

Secondly, we are looking at transformation. Indeed, the market itself is challenging. While the current market is experiencing double-digit growth, it was declining in 2016, due to the macroeconomic situation in Malaysia. The challenge when managing a Malaysian affiliate is to revise our priorities and restructure our team, so we are best prepared for the challenges of the future market.

My final priority is to continue to develop and expand the diversity of our staff so that we can become an incubator for new ideas. The team has a high level of commitment and we care about the “fun factor” in the job. My motto is “life is beautiful” and I truly believe that the happier the team, the stronger the impact.

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