Franck Hamalian – General Manager, Aspen France



Above all, Aspen is much more than a regular pharma company

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Franck Hamalian,

general manager of the French affiliate of Aspen, a specialty and branded multinational pharmaceutical company from South Africa, discusses the Group's unique business model which revolves around strategic acquisitions and strong productive capabilities. Additionally, he describes the French ecosystem regarding key topics such as big data and market access.

What attracted you to join Aspen last April?

After spending some time in two Big Pharma companies, I was interested in joining a completely different organization. Aspen has a unique business model bringing together innovative products and a traditional generics business. Aspen creates high quality, affordable, difficult-to-produce, specialty products which are transversal within the healthcare system.

In France, we are strong in anaesthetics and antithrombotic products. In these areas, we are leveraging a strategic value chain method. We are not an R&D company, so we develop ourselves through acquisitions that are in line with the company's strategy, resulting in a brand-new portfolio and that we fully integrate into our operations. This is actually something quite unique for a pharmaceutical company. Indeed, in traditional Big Pharma, companies merge and the portfolios are then sorted and either sold off or kept. At Aspen, we aim for very specific products and we internalize production as quickly as possible. Everything at the Group is driven by production

capabilities and the ability to acquire what is needed in the fastest way possible.

Additionally, there are very few MNCs which have been initiated in emerging countries. This is very interesting to me and fits into my management experience having worked in emerging markets. These kinds of markets are very volatile and I appreciate very much this mindset we must have of adaptability and flexibility to make decisions.

Above all, Aspen is much more than a regular pharma company, it is a unique specialty products company with a strong industrial footprint in matured and emerging markets. The products we manufacture and commercialize are contributing to making the healthcare system more efficient and ensuring that France is not at the backend of accessing innovation. Furthermore, we are providing educational programs to healthcare practitioners, investing in clinical studies, and interacting with healthcare stakeholders. To summarize, the distinct role that Aspen plays in the French market brought me to the company.

How do you view the unique autonomy given to upper management within Aspen?

With this entrepreneurial spirit, there is an ability on a local level to propose, create, and decide. This is a change from most of the Big Pharma companies where I have been and is something that has drawn me into Aspen. This is a lean organization where decisions can be made quickly, and implementation is efficient. This was what spurred my decision to join the group – to make an impact.

Can you introduce the French presence of Aspen along with its scope and capabilities within the market?

The importance of France for Aspen is very significant. Worldwide, there are more than 10,000 Aspen employees, 1,000 of which are based in France. Since 2014, we have invested around EUR 200 million (USD 227 million) in our Notre Dame de Bondeville manufacturing site while increasing our antithrombotic capabilities there. Starting this year, we will transfer and create brand new capabilities in anaesthetics through our agreement with AstraZeneca, giving us exclusive commercialization rights to the medicines in markets outside the US. Aspen decided very early on to incorporate the anaesthetic area in France and out of the total investments we have made, EUR 65 million (USD 74 million) will go directly to building up this business activity from scratch.

From the commercial side, the affiliate is a EUR 90 million (USD 100 million) operation here in France. Having only started just over four years ago, we have grown nicely both organically and through acquisitions. France is the second largest country in Europe for Aspen in terms of turnover, behind Germany, and sixth globally. The affiliate is hence very strategically important for the Group on both sides, production and commercial. The Notre Dame de Bondeville site is a key platform for production and productivity for the Aspen Group.

How does Aspen fit into the market specifics of France?

It is clear that there are two types of acquisitions that Aspen is following; those that are regionalized (mainly in emerging markets) and those that are on a more global level. On a global level, France plays an important role because it is a top five market in most therapeutic areas, especially for anaesthetics. Additionally, France has highly renowned key opinion leaders in anti-thrombotics and anaesthetics who can play a key role in the discussion of how to develop these areas in other countries.

As a highly regulated market, France is complex in a way. However, this stringency obligates us to be more innovative and creative to do business in the environment. For example, data usage in France must adhere to certain rules, unlike other countries in the world. This motivates us to find original and compliant solutions which can create best practices for other countries.

How is the Aspen product portfolio evolving in France?

Anti-thrombotics are the broadest area in the portfolio currently. We have four well-known brands; Fraxiparine®, Fraxodi®, Arixtra®, and Orgaran®, each of which has its own unique positioning in the market. These brands cover a vast majority of patient needs in anti-thrombotic and are primarily produced in France. Notre Dame de Bondeville is the worldwide production site of Arixtra®, Fraxiparine® and Fraxodi® are both also produced at the site.

There is a vast interest in this portfolio because we are dealing with very specific patient profiles. For each patient profile, the right anti-thrombotic product must be identified with the correct dosage and length of treatment while addressing the unique needs of each patient. In Notre Dame de Bondeville we have a centre of expertise on anti-thrombotics working on the next innovations. The concept behind this is that we are constantly getting closer to best meeting these distinctive patient needs. In the end, this is a very personalized area which is why having such a broad

portfolio gives Aspen an advantage.

On the other hand, we have a full range of anaesthetic products and our portfolio is well known and used as a market leader. These are very important products because anaesthetics are one of the therapeutic areas in France suffering from drug shortages. One of the key challenges for Aspen in France is to ensure that this situation will not happen as frequently. This is why the investment we are making into anaesthetics is crucial.

We are offering quality products at a reasonable price, which offers the health system a favourable return on investment. Through our portfolio, Aspen aims to play an active role in the balancing of costs for France’s healthcare system.

How do you view market access in France and how does Aspen nurture the partnership with health stakeholders?

For all products, whether they are extremely innovative or long-standing on the market, access is something which is equally considered by all pharma players. Market access is a permanent dialogue between health authorities, healthcare professionals and the industry to find the right balance behind price, volumes, investments and education. I do not see market access as a negative subject, but rather a principle lever in the health environment which we have to incorporate daily. Moving forward, as equal parts of healthcare in France, we must consider ways to increase transparency and reduce lengthy timelines across the entire process.

What are your key priorities for Aspen as general manager?

My short-term goal is to continue to grow and do so in a sustainable manner. Our aim is not to invest in one product for a few years then move to a new area, but rather to establish a strong portfolio base and create long-term relationships. We are a growing organization, recruiting new talent to the business, and developing ourselves through acquisitions. Therefore, I need to ensure Aspen is prepared to integrate any new acquisitions.

Additionally, I am focused on bringing the newest innovations to the organization. Through embracing trends like digitalization, we are taking a look at how we can apply these new technologies into various functions such as how we operate on a daily basis, interact with individuals within the organization, and assess our own performance. In our day to day, we are

preparing capabilities to be first movers in the evolution of the pharma industry.

What challenges do you see for France to be a leader in big data?

The main challenge is to be sure that all the key actors are going in the same direction. Meaning France is full of data, but the question is whether it is consolidated enough. More investment must be made to create an in-depth database at a national level that can be leveraged in an applicable way. I believe there is nothing that prevents France from being at the top of the digital revolution. A mutual interest has been taken by the government and the industry for data technology, but there is still room for improvement in speeding up development. Additionally, we need to be pragmatic in defining the rules and identifying the players that will be given access to specific data. With such a sensitive issue, certain kinds of data must be allocated to the right stakeholders. Clear definitions will help to establish a viable health data system.

Two members of the Aspen team attended the 8th edition of the Strategic Council of Health Industries (CSIS) that took place last July in Paris and held talks with Prime Minister Edouard Philippe. What type of message does a company like Aspen, coming from an emerging market and with such a large footprint in France, have to deliver to the authorities?

Aspen is the only African company with a strong foothold in France on both the commercial and production side. The message from Aspen is that a company headquartered in South Africa has a goal to establish a long-term partnership within France to leverage the country's market capabilities. France has a very strong infrastructure on all sides that is very attractive to conduct business in. We are in line with the intent of the government to attract investment and reindustrialize the country.

In Aspen, we aim to have a close collaboration with key players in the healthcare system, including the government. For this, like any industry player, we need transparency, consistency, and predictability. With this kind of environment, we can continue to commit to the country as we have been doing as a top investor for a few years now.

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