Ian Wilders – Managing Director, Labo’Life, Spain

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05.04.2019

Tags: Spain, Micro-Immunotherapy, Labo'Life, Strategy

Ian Wilders, managing director of Labo’Life, a Spanish micro-immunotherapy specialist, discusses the company’s history and the importance of regulatory reform in giving them greater market access and shifting the mindset of doctors. Furthermore, he touches on the company’s international strategy and the importance of a personalized care approach.

Could you introduce Labo’Life to our international audience?

Labo’Life was created over 25 years ago and is based around the technology of micro-immunotherapy. In fact, the roots of the therapy are from a Belgian doctor who serviced the Royal family many years ago and had some interesting results when working with homeopathy. When he witnessed results with the use of immunomodulatory substances, he wondered how this could be used to modulate the immune system. He first applied the treatment on himself, then on patients; a method which today would not be looked at very fondly. Nevertheless, through this method, he fine-tuned his medicines, and in the ’90s Labo’Life was founded using this technology.

Classical immunotherapy utilizes a patient’s immune system to fight a condition, though, with their concentrations, it results in significant side-effects. Micro-immunotherapy is a side branch of this therapeutic approach and informs the immune system to perform in a certain way without the side effects. For example, we have formulas of different proteins that send specific messages to the body, and this creates a certain type of bodily reaction.

Why was Spain chosen as the home of the company?

We originally started with Belgian and French doctors, though when we were looking to set-up a pharmaceutical lab and production facility, it was easier to get authorization in Spain, rather than France. Furthermore, in Mallorca they were looking for high technology, non-polluting companies that offer jobs year-round, and Labo'Life offers this.

Mallorca has been very welcoming to us, and two years ago we completed the extension of our offices, which are the only industrial offices in Mallorca with an 'A' classification rating for sustainability. We now have 130 staff, with 70 being located in Spain, and 90 percent of our production is in Spain as well as our main part of R&D. The island has an excellent university, which gives us the opportunity to draw out of a talented talent pool with limited competition.

Our clinical evaluations are done in France. For many countries when utilizing grants, you must have pre-approval, and this requires you to wait. In France, this is not the case, so given our commitment to micro-immunotherapy development, we prefer to go ahead with the project and receive the grants along the way.

How well prepared are the regulatory frameworks for your medicines?

Regulations are constructed for mainstream medicines, and complementary medicines work in ways not always aligned to this regulation. We are on the border of this, as we are doing something completely different, and therefore it is quite hard for the authorities to classify micro-immunotherapy. Our challenge is defining the regulatory framework in which we are classed, so in the end, patients can receive our therapies.

Have you been able to define this regulation?

In the 90s there was basically no regulatory framework for us, and if you produced at a low enough dose you could deliver your medicines. Then the European directives came into force, and if you had a certain dilution you were considered homeopathy, so we chose this category. Then in the early 2000s, Spain put in a framework that froze the registration process altogether.

Now the regulation is slowly catching up and later this year we will present our medicines for registration, though we do not know when they will be approved. It is really a junction point for our therapies in Spain. Nevertheless, we see that in other countries we operate, for example, Belgium, they are a lot more open-minded, and I would say are a more mature market when it comes to registration.

Where do most of your revenue come from?

We have a very balanced revenue flow between Belgium, France and Spain, and we are attracting individual customer demands from Switzerland, Austria and Germany. It really is a therapy people are looking for and the doctors we are working with are very interested. They are scientifically minded doctors that are looking for solutions and our therapies can be very much part of the personalized care strategy for patients, and this is what we want. We do not want every patient to use our products, but only the ones that need it. For many conditions, there is a lack of solutions, and we can help doctors solve these issues.

How do you interact with the medical community?

They are open-minded to hearing from us, and we are active in showing ourselves across Europe. Nevertheless, the clear obstacle is still regulation as doctors are sceptical of therapies not backed by the government. Therefore, once we have registration approved, this will go a great way in valuing the innovation that we provide to patients. The doctors we work with are very interested in understanding our therapies and which patients are best suited to them. We are very fortunate in this regard

What can you do to bring on-side policymakers?

The government has precaution as making a change is always considered at some level a risk. Another hurdle is the regulation of our medicines is controlled in Brussels at the European level. Having this central control is good at times, though for medicines it really puts a block on promoting innovation. Unfortunately, we are on the wrong side of the law in this case. With elections coming up, we hope that we can spark a new wave of discussion to changing this in some way, though really, we believe the voice of the patient will be strongest in pushing forward this

cause.

What have been your main priorities since taking up the position?

The first priority was the restructuring of the company to be more efficient, as we had grown rapidly so it was important to reorganize and focus on efficiency. Secondly, we had to consolidate our position on the market after a challenging period through the crisis, and we have been able to do this effectively. Additionally, we started to work more heavily in a direct manner with medical professionals as we wanted them to understand the true value we could offer.

The company recently merged with Laboratoires Lorica. How does this fit into your strategy?

The founder of Labo'Life had a connection with the French company, Laboratoires Lorica, a health supplement company. We identified synergies and decided to merge, though this will only be fully complete in 2020. Furthermore, with our core knowledge in immune system biotechnology, we now have a diversification expert who is continually looking for opportunities throughout Europe.

Where do you see your competition coming from?

We do not feel there is much competition not because we are a supremely unique company, but because our treatments are meant to be part of therapies, rather than complete solutions. They can go hand-in-hand with other treatments, such as classical immunotherapy or complementary medicines, in an integrative approach, though doctors must be been trained in micro-immunotherapy.

Where will we find Labo'Life in the future?

A much bigger player and with our therapies registered. Furthermore, our extensive pipeline, backed by our R&D, will also have achieved registration and patients will be a lot more aware of the value that Labo'Life's micro-immunotherapy brings to their lives.

Additionally, we are looking a lot more outside Europe and will have our first product registered in Colombia shortly, with interest in countries like Ukraine and Canada. We find with the political

challenges in Europe currently, going abroad is a way of diversifying and growing our brand.

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