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Anne-Laurence Sabatini, vice president of Cluster France, Canada & Benelux at LEO Pharma, discusses the transformation of the company and how this has trickled down to her cluster. Furthermore, she talks about the strategic importance of France and the steps LEO Pharma is taking to be the preferred medical dermatology partner globally, with a clear patient focus.

LEO Pharma has been going through an interesting transformation period, notably through the acquisition of Bayer's prescription dermatology unit, the divestment of its non-dermatologic portfolio to Karo Pharma AB and the structural reconfiguration around clusters. How have these changes impacted the local affiliate?

Since 2016, we have indeed been experiencing a strong transformation, though we continue to be pushing towards our end goal: to help people suffering from skin diseases, with our target by 2025 to help 125 million people. Therefore, we are focusing our efforts as a company to grow our dermatological portfolio and have divested other products not related to this area to Karo Pharma AB.

For example, we made this divestment 18 months ago, while purchasing the Astellas dermatology portfolio three years ago, and Bayer´s around one year ago. In France, we plan to bring these purchased Bayer products as our own during summer this year and this will allow us to build

around the company´s global strategy of two product portfolios.

Firstly, the established products with topical treatments and thrombosis, and the second portfolio targeted towards innovative products. In France, we launched last year two products from each portfolio; one to treat mild to moderate psoriasis and the second a biologic treatment for moderate to serious psoriasis patients.

Furthermore, there were moves from a structural point of view, and now I head the cluster of France, Canada and Benelux.

You have been in the role for 2.5 years now. What has been at the top of your priorities?

Since 2016, I am head of Cluster France-Benelux and Canada. My top priority is to work towards managing the cluster. We do not work as individual nations, but as a group, and have specific leaders dedicated towards the different therapeutic areas, while also allowing us to create a tailored approach for each nation. This is always by having a connection with the rest of Europe+, the region to which my cluster belongs to.

And if you look at the three markets of the cluster, they are all mature with cultural similarities. Nevertheless, in regard to market access, there are differences, for example, in Canada you must deal with each province for discussions, while in France and Belgium it is a centralized approach. In the field of biologics, Canada, Belgium are within the retail space, while in the Netherlands, it is a hospital market and in France it is closed to a retail market.

How is the portfolio for the company portrayed in France?

We have all LEO Pharma’s products. , and for products like LMWH, France represents 40 percent of the global turnover. Furthermore, we have a production plant in France producing this product.

In September 2018 we launched our first product in our biologics range, and the company´s foray into rare diseases is in the development phase via a partnership with PellePharm to move towards treating patients with conditions such as Gorlin Syndrome.

How open-minded is France to accepting innovation?

Market access in France, in general, is tough

It is a country that accepts innovation, and we have certain regulations that help, especially when getting different indications approved for the same product.

Nevertheless, we see that market access in France, in general, is tough. We are not always part of the first countries to launch which is worrying. But at the same time, this gives us an opportunity to learn from the launch of other affiliates. This time delay is due to the long negotiations with the health authorities, and lower pricing. A recent study by the LEEM (the pharmaceutical industry's association in France) indicated that from market authorization to the acceptance of the official dossier, it is over 500 days, a lot more than the EU average of 180 days.

To improve this time delay for LEO Pharma France, we are doing a lot to show the excellent value of our products for the nation, and how we are investing at a higher level in the country, through production and R&D. The recent government reforms have made us quite optimistic, and we have had quite good talks with the authorities some time ago, but actions are louder than words, so we must really wait and just see what happens.

LEO Pharma has invested a lot in production and R&D in France. What makes the nation a good site for such operations?

We have good competencies built around our long experience in manufacturing products such as LMWH, and we also package our biologics range at the same location. As the head of the cluster, and French affiliate, I am always looking to attract the lure of HQ to invest into France, and our CEO, Gitte Aabo, has been active in our talks with French authorities.

On the side of R&D, France has most of on-going the studies for LEO Pharma, and we do this by setting up collaborations with centres and dermatology associations to develop and run clinical studies.

How well covered is dermatology in France?

The number of dermatologists in France is decreasing, and it is quite worrying, as it means that in some parts of the country, we do not have any specialists, and this creates health issues for patients. To counter this, we are working to train GP´s to diagnose key diseases in a quicker

manner and to also develop the idea of telemedicine. For example, within the LEO Innovation Lab we are developing a concept based around photos of skin diseases. GPs and dermatologists will have an application to help them better diagnose patients, and possibly in the latter future patients will be able to also have this app so they can help themselves to some extent.

Our company goal is to be the global leaders in dermatological R&D, and this is not just shown through our pipeline, but also through our open innovation system in Denmark. LEO Pharma gives access to anyone, even rival companies, to test their dermatology compounds within our laboratories, and this idea highly impressed the French authorities when we met. With this strategy, along with our portfolio acquisition and partnerships, we see LEO Pharma positioning itself as the global leader in medical dermatology.

France globally is the leading market for LEO Pharma. How do you stay in that top position?

It is becoming tougher and tougher, but we aim to stay one of the leading market for LEO Pharma. Our objective is to deliver beyond expectations but US should become the first market thank to the launch of our biotherapy. This is critical for the success of the LEO Pharma Group.

Many companies use the term “patient centricity”. How do you apply this to LEO Pharma France?

You are right, many companies state they have a patient focus, though in our case I will give a clear example to show why at LEO Pharma we act on this.

In 2002, based on feedback from patients regarding one of our topical treatment producing slow results, we undertook a lot of R&D to develop another galenic combining two active substances. After some time, the patients then informed us the new topical was acting faster but was hard to apply, so we developed another one. Then we were told despite the new one was easiest to apply, it was not as effective as the previous form. So, we again developed a new product, with an innovative galenic which we launched last year and the feedback are very good.

As you can see along each of these steps, we are engaged with patients to find solutions that benefit them. At this year’s LEO 100 event (during which all the affiliates’ general managers gather), we had patients’ representatives attend, with the idea of interacting with us and sharing

their concerns. We can hence better understand their needs and be closer to their daily struggles. LEO Pharma truly has the patient voice in every action and product. Patient centricity is far from just being a buzzword.

What are your expectations for LEO Pharma France in the future?

To first, ensure our innovative products reach the market at the same speed as other leading nations around the globe. And help develop the network of dermatologists in France, which is currently decreasing, ensuring that patients have access to a healthcare professional either physically or through telemedicine.

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