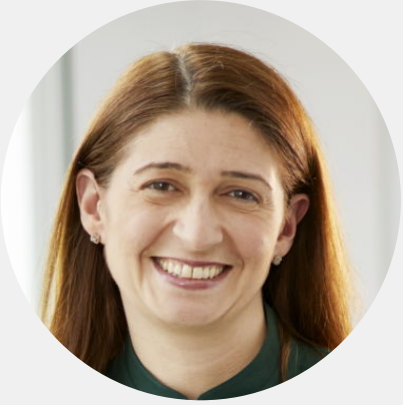
Michelle Werner – Country President Nordics and Baltics, AstraZeneca



Since the beginning, we have had a very significant presence [in Sweden], closely linked to our history and heritage

03.10.2019

Tags: Sweden, Strategy, AstraZeneca, Market Access, Nordics, Baltics

Michelle Werner, country president for AstraZeneca's Nordics and Baltics region, highlights the company's strong connections with local stakeholders due to its historic roots and large footprint in Sweden. Werner also discusses how the organization, which employs nearly 7,000 people in the country, plays an integral part in ensuring that patients have access to the latest innovative treatments.

Michelle, you have been working for AstraZeneca for more than four years now, being appointed to your first country president position in 2018. What was your motivation to take on this position?

I really wanted to come back to Europe, work in countries in which I had not spent much time before and get to know the systems there. The country president role allows one to have a holistic view and understand the entire breadth and depth of the organization.

While I was very focused on the oncology treatment area in my previous role, I now have full visibility across our three therapeutic areas. My role goes beyond commercial aspects, as I now get to see across different functions such as market access, pricing, medical affairs, and HR. Additionally, it is fantastic and special to be here at the mothership of AstraZeneca, as Sweden is the birthplace of Astra. Since the beginning, we have had a very significant presence here, closely

linked to our history and heritage. I am very happy to be here to get a flavour of our origins, while of course having the visibility of the entirety of our business in this role.

What has been your experience of being on the frontline so far, leading a region with such historical importance for the company?

It has been exciting and even a bit unexpected to see the great collaboration here in Sweden, which is closely linked to our longstanding presence in the country, with approximately 7,000 employees here. At our Södertälje campus, we have around 4,500 people working in our flagship facility for manufacturing, as well as other functions, while another 2,500 are based in Gothenburg at one of our three global strategic R&D hubs.

Our marketing company has presences in all of the Nordic and Baltic countries, with a significant number of our commercial team also being co-located in Södertälje. Due to this strong presence and heritage here in Sweden, the access to key stakeholders is truly unprecedented and certainly unique within the industry and within AstraZeneca in other parts of the world too. Having these strong relationships with government stakeholders, healthcare professionals, and patient associations is critical, as it has really shaped the way we work and how we can advance healthcare for patients in this part of the world.

We are collaborating as much as possible across our different functions, as we see the value that comes when working together internally since it translates into the value we create externally. There is no doubt that it makes sense to leverage the entirety of our footprint here in Sweden.

AstraZeneca has posted very strong results globally, growing by around 17 percent in H1 of 2019. What do you see as the most important growth drivers in the innovative Nordics and Baltics healthcare system?

Similar to what we have seen at a global level, AstraZeneca in the Nordics and Baltics has just returned to growth. Looking ahead and seeing the exciting product launches in the coming months and years, we expect this trajectory to continue. It is a really exciting time, which we all have been working for, given the history we had in relation to the loss of exclusivity rights of blockbusters. We are happy now to look forward to the next generation of blockbusters, but most importantly to continue to have a positive impact on patient lives.

What is the importance of new product launches compared to mature products in driving performance?

We take the opportunity to transform medical practice quite seriously, by closely cooperating with medical professionals and society. The introduction of new medicines plays a key role in that and we are in a true era of innovation, as there have never been more advances in the treatment of serious diseases as there have been in the last five years.

From a company perspective, we are focused on our key growth drivers, coming from the introduction of new medicines, while certainly not discounting the importance of older medicines for patient lives. Sweden and other markets, such as Denmark and Estonia, are frequently amongst the earliest launch countries for new products, usually soon after EMEA approval, partly due to our strong relationships with stakeholders in the region. We really understand what these partnerships have to look like, and we are working very far in advance to ensure early access to our products.

What do you see as the main strengths of the Swedish, Nordics, and Baltics life sciences ecosystem?

In Sweden, quality registries give access to valuable real-world data, which is extremely important to the introduction of medicines here. Additionally, the country’s strong digital footprint, with every patient having a unique electronic health record, brings a lot of potential and helps us to understand patient populations and real-world evidence that supports clinical studies.

When the Swedish government is assessing the value of certain medicines, the health records are usually also used in this process. We have similar opportunities in Denmark and Norway, however, there are differences in the way the government wants to use these quality registries. Estonia can serve as a microcosm for Europe’s future in leveraging digital tools for healthcare, as a single electronic health record captures data for all patients, which makes it a very interesting market. Sweden is also striving to move in this direction, as it opens a whole new world of possibilities.

A core pillar for AstraZeneca’s growth strategy for innovative treatments worldwide is the way we work with payers. I believe that Sweden’s approach of leveraging quality registries and its real-world evidence can serve as an example. The globe is looking at how Sweden is tracking and using data and uses it for payment collaborations. We have a huge importance of upscaling the capabilities within our organizations and even the industry in order to make these types of

advancements for patients worldwide.

When we met with Anders Ekblom, former CEO of AstraZeneca Sweden AB, he regretted the fact that the adoption of new therapies is not fast enough in Sweden because of the fragmented healthcare system. What is your view on this issue?

There is still an opportunity here in Sweden to accelerate this process. Sweden has a strong drive to promote equal healthcare to its citizens and is in the first wave of new product launches. When it comes to the actual adoption of innovative medicines, Sweden has room for improvement. Our job is to continue the collaboration with the healthcare system, so all of the guidelines which determine the access for patients to new treatments keeps up with the speed of innovation of our industry.

AstraZeneca's oncology unit has been growing by more than 50 percent in H1. Sweden being the country with the highest 5-year relative survival rates for all cancers is in the EU by a strong margin, do you feel that there is still much appetite from the authorities to embrace the latest innovation in this crucial field, or has the focus has somewhat moved to other areas?

The collaborations we have with government stakeholders, such as the TLV, have helped them to plan in advance for new innovative products, we are planning to bring to Sweden. Most of our oncology treatments are reimbursed in Sweden, so we definitely still see that the authorities are willing to embrace innovation and ensure national reimbursement. Obviously, there are other novel, complex treatments like CAR-T, which may require a whole different mechanism of reimbursement. I do believe that there is a keen interest that patients suffering from different types of cancers have access to treatments but there is more work to do for the industry to collaborate with stakeholders to find innovative ways to ensure accessibility.

What has been your blueprint for launching new, innovative cancer therapies such as Lynparza and Imfinzi successfully in Sweden? Is there any difference here than launching products in the US?

It is necessary to start early and engage with stakeholders while leveraging the real-world evidence available in the country. It is a very different approach to product launches in the US, as there is a big focus on share of voice and the launch speed is more determined by the pace of the internal organization. In Sweden, the priority lies in collaboration with government, key external stakeholders and of course patients and physicians.

How do you perceive the Swedish way of working, which is very much based on collaboration?

Certainly, there are cultural aspects to which one has to adapt, but I was definitely prepared for the consensus structure we have in place here. Due to the different countries in the region, there is no certain culture omnipresent, so it is really a melting pot of cultures, particularly here at AstraZeneca. There is a sense of urgency and speedy decision-making in this region, which I find appealing personally. Moreover, a strong focus on collaboration can be felt everywhere, and it is refreshing to see that brilliant ideas can come from all parts of the ecosystem. AstraZeneca has over 200 collaborations in R&D alone here in Sweden, for example with the Karolinska Institutet and our BioVenture Hub at the Gothenburg R&D site.

What is your vision for AstraZeneca in the Nordics and Baltics for the next four to five years?

There is a big focus on innovation across all areas of industry in the Nordics and we aim to leverage this, looking outside the pharma industry for new inspiration. The culture of innovation here will set the bar of what we can do in the healthcare space in the future. We are already thinking of collaborations in the medtech and healthtech field that can further advance the experience for people, who are interacting with the healthcare system. Sweden has the opportunity to lead the way in this regard, and AstraZeneca aims to be at the forefront of this movement while acting in a sustainable manner.

See more interviews