Vatroslav Mateljic – General Manager, Takeda Sweden

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Originally from Croatia, Vatroslav Mateljic was appointed as the general manager of Takeda Sweden in April 2019. Mateljic outlines how Takeda is integrating Shire operations in Sweden, highlights how Sweden's innovation potential could pave the way for a value-based healthcare system, and how solutions and learnings from the Swedish affiliate should be leveraged globally.

Vatroslav, you have worked for most of your career in South Eastern Europe, for multinationals such as Abbott, AstraZeneca and of course Takeda. Being appointed as GM of the Swedish affiliate six months ago, what has been your first observations in the country?

Sweden is a market that embraces innovation and pilot projects very quickly. In my view, this creates a great environment for innovation partnerships leading to solutions that later can be scaled up in other developed markets, but also learn from this to launch in emerging countries.

Takeda has recently completed the acquisition of Shire, which had a large footprint in Sweden. What have you set out as your main priorities?

My priority is to put Takeda and Shire together here in Sweden through successfully and quickly integrating both companies. After, we are looking to further increase our presence in Sweden, improve the image and branding of Takeda whilst becoming a true partner for all stakeholders in the country. The portfolios of both companies complement each other very well, as Shire had a strong footprint in rare diseases and neuroscience. Recently, Takeda has been on an exciting transformation journey from primary to specialty care and together we are within the Top Ten pharmaceutical companies globally, as well as in Sweden.

Takeda is focusing its R&D efforts on four therapeutic areas. What do you see as your most important growth drivers in Sweden?

We have a strong footprint in gastroenterology (GI), oncology, neuroscience, rare diseases as well as plasma-derived therapies. The merger will allow us to create synergies, so we will be in a much stronger position than the two stand-alone entities could be in. We have the ambition to become the leading global GI company by 2025, so this is, of course, one area of focus here in Sweden. We also have selective areas of oncology that are performing very well in the country. Neuroscience is also a key driver in Sweden, with our portfolio for attention deficit and hyperactivity disorders being our strongest business unit overall.

Oncology continues to remain a priority for Takeda, exemplified by the recent EMA approval of Alunbrig. As Sweden has the highest five-year relative survival rates for all cancers in the EU, do you feel that there is still an appetite from the authorities to embrace the latest innovation in this crucial field?

Alunbrig is one of our greatest products for the treatment of lung cancer, bringing significant additional benefits to patients diagnosed with ALK positive non-small cell lung cancer. The reimbursement process for this particular treatment was very fast here in Sweden and the first patient in Sweden was treated only ten days after the EMA approval, which is an incredible achievement for Takeda but also the patients of Sweden. This really shows that the authorities have the willingness to embrace and reimburse innovative oncology products and we would like to see similar success stories in the future for cell and gene therapies. Our aim is to continue to work with all stakeholders to secure access for products, particularly for small patient groups in the rare diseases area, which have a high unmet medical need but may not be on the radar of the authorities yet.

How would you assess the access to innovative medicines here in Sweden, considering the countries very decentralized reimbursement system?

Sweden is very committed to its new life sciences strategy. Looking at novel therapies, there is the New Therapies (NT) Council focusing on new innovative treatments, for example within rare diseases securing a national equal introduction throughout the country. While the regional system may seem fragmented at first, it also opens up possibilities to try new innovations for patient-centric care in a small format and then take the conclusions drawn from these clinical practices in one region and use them as a reference point to scale up the product for the rest of the Swedish market. Takeda has different projects in the regions, collaborating with patient organizations and other stakeholders, to use this decentralized system as an opportunity to bring faster market access, through having the necessary real-world evidence.

Value-based care is one of Sweden's key features, particularly interesting as the country has great health data thanks to its Quality Registries and Biobanks. The Economist Intelligence Unit and Takeda worked on a report looking at the Swedish system. What have been the main findings?

The report showed that Sweden is a worldwide leader in approaching value-based healthcare, as we have the right building blocks with the quality registries, the integrated care solutions and the collaboration between authorities, industry, and academia. Takeda perceives Sweden as a very important country, in which we invest additional resources to build centres of excellence. Two of Takeda's centres of excellence in the Nordics are related to innovation beyond the medicine and to real-world evidence generation. Our intention is to upscale the findings and solutions from Sweden to other countries, so our global operations can benefit from our work. As an example, we have several ongoing projects related to artificial intelligence in different therapeutic areas, leveraging experiences from other industries such as automobile and banking. Our partners are helping us to create predictive mechanisms for faster diagnosis of rare diseases, utilizing, for example, AI and blockchain technology. Takeda Sweden collaborates with all stakeholders to find holistic solutions beyond single therapeutic areas or products to generate a sustainable healthcare environment.

Your peers in the country have stressed that although Sweden is a small market, it is in many ways an ideal testbed for new product launches and follow-up thanks to its sophisticated healthcare ecosystem. Does Takeda share the same mindset using

Sweden for product launches?

We are able to launch some of our products very fast, but we also have to acknowledge that there are still some obstacles when it comes to the access of personalized medicine, such as cell and gene therapies. Takeda is working in this field, as some of the products already have been given approval by EMA and now going through the evaluation process in Sweden. In my opinion, the assessment methods could be adjusted better to this new generation of medicines, so patients can receive treatments faster, which would stem from the authorities' better acknowledgement of the value of these new therapies. Takeda is collaborating with payers and other stakeholders, to develop innovative contracting solutions that are not based on a volume or price mechanism, but purely on generated patient value.

Considering this unique environment, do you see potential areas where other Takeda affiliates can learn from the Swedish operations?

Other colleagues should be bold and drive forward innovation as we do here in Sweden. It is important, to have good relationships with authorities and stakeholders to create solutions that are sustainable, especially when looking at our pipeline that involves many new therapies, for which new approval mechanisms are needed to reach patients. Sweden is definitely on the forefront of this and other countries should strive for reaching this level.

How would you like to see the affiliate to develop in the future?

Our goal for the future is to be in here for the long-term, as we do not only want quick commercial wins. Takeda has a heritage of more than 238 years and is based on strong values. This is quite unique. In our corporate philosophy, integrity is a core value, which translates into our decision-making priorities: patients, trust, reputation, and business, with patients being the most important one. Based on Takeda's values, we aspire to become a leader in all our strategic therapy areas here in Sweden. Through collaboration and cocreation, we want to make our innovative products available as fast as possible.

Do you have a final message to our international audience?

Sweden is a great hub for breakthrough innovation, talent, and expertise. I invite everyone to have Sweden on their radars, I am convinced that solutions developed here will highly impact the future of life sciences!

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