# Jan Krejčí – Country Manager, Ewopharma, Czech Republic



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27.01.2020

Tags: Czech Republic, Ewopharma, Orphan Drugs, Consumer Healthcare

*Ewopharma's Jan Krejčí, Country Manager for the Czech affiliate for the last eight years, shares the achievements of the company in its two main business pillars, prescription drugs, and consumer healthcare, and the successful entry into the hospital segment through the challenging and rewarding journey launching Santhera's orphan drug for the treatment of Leber's Hereditary Optic Neuropathy (LHON). Krejčí also discusses the intricacies of the Czech Republic's market access system and evaluates the changes being implemented to make it faster and more transparent, whilst commenting on Ewopharma's values and vision in the context of their 60th anniversary.*

**How has Ewopharma's footprint in the country evolved since you took on the position as General Manager eight years ago?**

In the last years, we have progressed on many levels, one of the most important ones being the rearrangement of our business operations into two units: one dedicated to prescription drugs (Rx), and the other to consumer healthcare products. Then, a crucial part of this progression has been the addition of a third unit, which is still under development, dedicated to the hospital segment and

focused on orphan diseases, specifically on Leber’s Hereditary Optic Neuropathy (LHON), a very rare neuropathy in the area of ophthalmology. This is being done in partnership with Swiss company Santhera which is dedicated to this specialization in addition to neurological diseases.

Finalizing the negotiations with health insurance companies and receiving reimbursement for this product was a great success considering that it was the first time we got involved in orphan drugs. We entered a whole new world that took us on an interesting and rewarding learning journey that is still ongoing. Of course, our two other business units present challenges too. In Rx, the pricing and reimbursement pressure is high, and in consumer healthcare, we need to ensure we stand out from the crowd. It is not easy to reach agreements with the big pharmacy chains, but we continue to make efforts to reach win-win situations – otherwise, it makes no sense for us to be present in their stores.

**What parts of the business are driving growth?**

Within the prescription drug segment, the therapeutic area bringing major growth is gastroenterology, mainly through our long-lasting partnership with German company Dr. Falk. Moreover, we have our own products in allergology and immunology, and a small section in ears, nose, and throat (ENT).

The situation is similar within consumer healthcare: there is growth coming from both our partnerships and Ewopharma’s own brands. With BioGaia, one of our largest partners, we bring to market probiotics, and under our own brand, Revalid, we offer a range of cosmetics and hair care products. Furthermore, we have two smaller projects worth mentioning as well. These are the ginger and anis products in partnership with Belgian company Tilman, and our food for special medical purposes (FSMP) line — a formula for infants with a severe allergy to cow’s milk — alongside Mead Johnson Nutrition.

While we only have a few proprietary products, we continuously evaluate new opportunities for which, of course, we conduct in-depth analysis – either ourselves or with the help of external experts who provide insight into whether the initial investment that is required to develop and bring a new product to market is worth it; to foresee whether the project has a promising future and will materialize into a return or not.

**How successful have you been in growing your market share in the segments of over-the-counter (OTC) products and food supplements?**

BioGaia's portfolio is expanding. Initially, it consisted solely of probiotic drops, and last year, tablets were added to the range. We have launched one new product and have some more in the pipeline. In terms of volume, we plan to launch a new product every year, which goes in line with our ambition to grow our market share in this segment.

**Martin Slegl from IQVIA explained that the country is seeing major advances in e-commerce and that nine percent is being sold online in consumer health. How have you adapted to and taken advantage of the digital trend?**

We are doing our best to follow this trend. E-commerce is one of our key channels, and we support it through digital communications such as social media and search engine optimization (SEO) to ensure a strong online presence. Here in the Czech Republic, we were one of the first pharmaceutical companies to closely cooperate with Lékárna CZ, one of the country's oldest and biggest pharmacies. However, as the digital market develops, the big players realize its potential too and put their efforts into it. As with any trend, competition is high.

**In prescription drugs, you operate in gastroenterology, allergology and immunology. What have been your main successes in launching new products in these areas?**

Each launch is unique. When we launched our eardrops, for instance, we were slightly pessimistic. Nonetheless, the product was well-received, leading to the development of ENT as our new strategic target segment.

In ophthalmology, despite the initial struggles that we encountered, we have experienced great success in the last six months. As LHON is an ultra-orphan disease, we found it is extremely difficult to find patients. We could not find any for two years and only found the first one this year. After a long preparation, we are finally seeing economic results.

A launch we are especially looking forward to — the team here in the affiliate is working on it at the moment — is Jorveza, a very unique and innovative product for the treatment of eosinophilic esophagitis (EoE), a chronic, allergic inflammatory disease of the esophagus. Jorveza was awarded as the innovative product of the year in Germany, which increased our anticipation to bring it to

the Czech market.

Furthermore, we launched a granule dosage form of one of Dr. Falk's products that was previously only available in tablets until then.

**The Czech Republic is considered one of the most regulated markets in the world when it comes to prescription drugs. How do you help your partners navigate the complexities of the Czech healthcare ecosystem?**

It can be difficult to explain the intricacies of the Czech pricing and reimbursement system to our partners – both existing and potential ones. As experience has taught us, pricing and reimbursement revisions are constant, and the only way forward is transparency. When there is a change in pricing among the EU reference basket, the prices in the Czech Republic can be affected immediately. Although this does not always happen, our partners need to be aware that the chance exists, which is difficult to digest for them.

**What do you see as the most important regulatory changes affecting Ewopharma's business activities?**

I truly appreciate the proactive work of the State Institute for Drug Control (SUKL) and the Ministry of Health.

Firstly, the SUKL is implementing new measures to speed up the market access process and to make it more transparent, easier to monitor, and simpler to communicate to our partners.

Secondly, the MoH is addressing specific issues around orphan drugs that are currently being treated as normal pharmaceutical products and take approximately two and a half years to make it to market, which is too long.

In our case, the urgency to get our orphan drug to market was somewhat lower as there was no imminent patient need. However, there are numerous cases in other specializations where companies face major challenges in this regard and patients are waiting to receive life-saving treatment. Any improvements in shortening the wait for patients in need of certain drugs are more than welcome.

**Ewopharma prides itself on its Swiss company values – could you tell us how this culture is reflected here?**

We certainly believe in the Swiss employment values: the way of dealing with people and of bringing high standards into the daily work. We work hard to fulfill as many of our goals and to do it in a timely manner. Our new corporate image reflects this and, naturally, our teams do too. Our people are loyal to Ewopharma’s mission and are responsible for its success, which we praise. It is fundamental that we are all on the same page; that we celebrate what we achieve together and breathe and live what we stand for and what we accomplish.

**2019 marks Ewopharma’s 60th anniversary. What is your vision for the years to come?**

We aim to maintain reasonable growth in our two main business units: we see potential both in the prescription drug segment and the consumer healthcare segment and plan to support them equally. Yet, at present, our key objective is to strengthen the discussed third pillar. Not only do we want to extend what we have already built but also take on the challenge of bringing to market other products in the hospital segment.

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