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Medical aesthetics is a beautiful business that will grow – I predict it will double or even triple in the next few years

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Adriana Stara, general manager Central Europe & Baltics at Allergan, explains how her previous experiences have prepared her to drive Allergan's business in the region. Stara also delves into Allergan's marketing strategy in medical aesthetics, the company's strongest franchise locally, and the characteristics of the Czech market when it comes to consumer behaviour. As AbbVie's acquisition of Allergan is almost completed, Stara shares her optimism about the future of the business in the region.

Adriana, you have extensive international experience in the pharmaceutical and medical device industries, having led companies such as AstraZeneca and Medtronic before joining Allergan nearly three years ago. Could you introduce yourself, your career and your journey at Allergan?

I started off my career wanting to become a scientist in order to develop a drug that would save lives, but I soon realized that these things do not go as smoothly or quickly as I previously thought. Therefore, I decided to do an MBA to get closer to the business world, and then I joined the pharmaceutical industry. In the industry, I climbed up the corporate ladder, which helps me understand the business of Allergan as well as the needs of the company, people and the environment.

Overall, I am proud of my experience. I began working in Serono, a small biopharmaceutical company, focused on key account management, and I then moved on to AstraZeneca, a well-known MNC. I also worked at Medtronic, a medical device company, which I must say is a completely different world to the pharmaceutical industry. As a result, I can apply all my previous experience in other companies to drive Allergan's business, as Allergan represents a beautiful combination of all of these three types of companies. At Allergan, we have medical devices in medical aesthetics and eye care, among other areas. The innovations coming from our eye care and neuroscience teams require a key account management approach, whereas our eye drops represent a mature portfolio, similar to that of a Big Pharma business.

In addition to the Czech Republic, as GM of Allergan for Central Europe & Baltics, I enjoy the international scope across these different markets. It gives me an opportunity to work with different people and add value to the teams.

How have you successfully implemented the company's global strategy to turn around the overall performance of these two regions?

The strategy you take in different areas is, in general, the same, but you adapt it to local needs. Focusing on medical aesthetics, as this is the strongest franchise in Allergan, we need to understand what the local market looks like, how physicians treat patients, and what patients and consumers are looking for. In medical aesthetics, we are mainly driven by the patient market.

We are aware that there are many psychological barriers impeding people from undergoing an aesthetic treatment – they think they will suffer from duck lips, or impaired movement of face muscles because of the toxins, which is not the case. Our motto is "to be the best of yourself": we want to achieve a natural and long-lasting look. At Allergan, we drive this strategy, while increasing public awareness of the ageing process and what happens to the face during our treatments. To clarify, the treatment does not necessarily change you. Instead, it slows the ageing process, making you look younger and more beautiful. A 50-year-old patient will not look 20 years old, but it will help them look 10 or even 15 years younger.

We have another set of tactics in the "Be the best of yourself" campaign which focuses on beautification. Here, young ladies approach us with a physical feature that is bothering them. Lips, for example, are currently very popular. I am not a big fan of enhancing lips because these have been widely exaggerated and sometimes, they become too big and unnatural. However, there are some women who have very thin lips and we can help them achieve a more natural and beautiful

look without innovations.

What are the characteristics of the Czech medical aesthetics market?

It is natural for a woman to want to be more attractive. However, in the Czech Republic they are not too open about it, when in fact, the market is growing extremely fast!

People demonstrate their interest via private channels; however, we do not get much public coverage in social media. Even celebrities do not talk about their treatments, compared to other countries. Instead, they pretend it is their natural look.

On the one hand, it makes me happy to see that we are living up to our promise of helping women feel more attractive through a natural look. On the other hand, people are not talking about their treatments as much as they should. We need to provide better brand and treatment awareness: emphasizing that it is possible to fix those little facial details while retaining a natural look.

What is your strategy to drive growth and profitability in the Central European & Baltic regions?

The Czech Republic is a good contributor to the success of medical aesthetics as this year our sales grew by 40 percent.

In general, Allergan has great potential, particularly in the medical aesthetic field. But not only this, we also have several products in our portfolio that will kick off in the next two or three years. This is the reason that AbbVie acquired Allergan: they believe in our strong product pipeline and in our medical aesthetics. Medical aesthetics is a beautiful business that will grow – I predict it will double or even triple in the next few years.

AbbVie is planning on letting us function as a stand-alone unit, which means we will have the freedom to innovate in terms of marketing and consumer activities. In this regard, we are ahead of the traditional pharma industry because we are working with medical devices that have different regulations and rules in communicating with the public and using digital channels.

What do you think are the keys to successfully launching medical aesthetics products in the Czech Republic?

It is important in this country to gain the trust of physicians and ensure that they understand the value of the product.

Juvederm, for example, is a dermal filler collection that offers five different products to meet different needs – the structure, hardness of the gel will depend on which area you are treating. For example, Juvederm Volux, the hardest gel, is used to modulate the jawline and chin, while Juvederm Volbella, the softest, is used for the lips. Overall, we need to explain to physicians the different properties and value of the products, and of course, how to carry out the injection procedure. And for this, we are organizing many practical pieces of training. For us as a partner to aesthetics clinics, it is very important that both, physicians and patients are happy with the results which will bring more patients to the clinics and help the aesthetics market grow.

What are some exciting projects within Allergan's other therapeutic areas?

In the field of eye care, Allergan has developed Ozurdex, a molecule intended to treat various eye diseases. In the Czech Republic, we have just received the reimbursement for the application of Ozurdex against macular diabetic edema, a side-effect of diabetes that debilitates human vision and can lead to blindness. This is another example of a key account management type of product, as it requires the collaboration of eye clinics and diabetes centres.

What are the projects you are most excited about for 2020?

I am, of course, very excited about AbbVie's acquisition of Allergan. I have experience with acquisitions on both sides – I have worked for both companies that have acquired, and that have been acquired, and it plays out very differently depending on which side you are on. Nonetheless, I always focus on the people. My mission is to look after my team here by providing good conditions and resources for everyone to remain motivated and take care of our customers and the business.

Moreover, I want to continue to grow. While another 40 percent would be difficult, I know we can definitely grow by double digits.

My next mission is to hand over our Rx portfolio to AbbVie in such a way that they continue to develop it. I am particularly excited about developing our Botox franchise and Eye Care. We also have a good reimbursement opportunity in the Czech Republic for future pipeline products. Here, it takes a long time to get reimbursement, as you need to provide solid and in-depth data to

demonstrate that you are benefiting the life of patients. However, as the market is stable, once you achieve reimbursement you are in a safe position. In other countries, for example in South East Europe, authorities can more unpredictably retract reimbursement status or cut down prices.

On a more personal note, you have had a very diverse career. What are the most interesting lessons you have learned and how are you looking to apply them in the future?

The key lesson I have learnt is that you need to take care of your team. It is important to constantly communicate your vision and the reasoning behind it. If your team understands what you want to achieve and why, they will support you in the journey and help to come up with better and more creative ideas then achieved alone.

Secondly, I learnt that things take time. Some projects do not move as quickly as I would hope. Nonetheless, I now realize it is more beneficial when things go at their own pace because you ultimately achieve better and more impactful results.

Allergan is a beautiful company with a great and diverse team. The team at Allergan is motivated to achieve more and move forward. As a relatively small company, we have a very agile and horizontal organization, which I very much enjoy.

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