Norina Alinta Gavan – CEO, Wörwag Pharma Romania



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Norina Alinta Gavan, CEO of Wörwag Pharma Romania, reveals how the affiliate will become more active and entrepreneurial with the change in shareholding while having an increased responsibility for the group. She shares her insights on how her team has contributed to Wörwag's consistent success, and how it has gained a reputation in the market for high-quality and standards. Alinta Gavan unveils a pilot program that aims at finding new talents in the market while elevating the importance of pharmacists in the country.

Now that Wörwag Pharma is becoming a self-contained legal entity, how will this change the affiliate's dynamic in the market?

There is a difference between being a representative than being a stand-alone affiliate. This will mean that Wörwag Pharma will have more responsibilities and have more strict rules in terms of actions. The affiliate will be more active in the market and from a financial point of view, it will have more accountability towards Wörwag's shareholders.

Currently, the organisation is focused on its distribution activities and this change will mean that it will have increased responsibilities. In Europe, there are stringent Good Distribution Practices and the Romanian drug agency is even stricter. In October of last year, the affiliate received its distribution license and started its activities in January. Hence, 2020 will be the practice year for the organisation to polish its processes. It is an exciting and important milestone for the

organisation, which holds a lot of promise for the future.

Wörwag Pharma Romania historically has grown above market conditions, and this I attribute to the dedication of the team. With the change in shareholding, we are confident to continue this trend and grow in line with the market projections of 2022.

Considering this step, do you anticipate a change in structure or service offering in the future?

Wörwag Pharma always offered a service to its customers, with a close approach to doctors, partners, and consumers. In recent years, we increased our efforts in educating consumers especially those suffering from diabetes, and especially diabetic neuropathy and diabetic food. Wörwag's core competency is biofactors — which are vitamins, minerals, and oligoelements — specifically in the area of prevention and treatment of diabetes, neurology, other metabolic diseases, cardiovascular diseases or gastroenterology.

Diabetic neuropathy and prevention of diabetic foot will remain the organisation's area of focus, and we hope to go into metabolic diseases soon.

The structure of the organisation will be unaltered, but the business model will change. The organisation's entrepreneurial thinking will be stronger as well as the scope of the competencies of the team will be broadened. Hence, the qualitative rather quantitative change will affect the organisation.

Where do you see the growth of the organisation coming from?

The environment offers opportunities that reflect changes in the lifestyle, culture, and market. Consumers increasingly want to have access to information, and this includes diabetes. This pathology is very prevalent in the country, it is forecasted to grow with the ageing of the population and with the changing in the lifestyle of the general population too. Currently, more than 100 new people per day are diagnosed with diabetes. Wörwag Pharma with its product can support and impact these pockets of population, suffering from diabetes and its complications. The aim is not only to improve the quality of life but inadvertently, the quantity of life. Romanian has one of the oldest populations in Europe, and this will translate into more patients with more needs.

What sets Wörwag Pharma apart from other competitors in the market?

After 22 years of operations, Wörwag Pharma is ranked 24th in the market and has 1.1 percent of the entire pharmaceutical market. These results stem from the team and our close collaboration with partners in the market. In 1999, we established our company slogan “prompt, flexible and friendly”, and this has been our values and guiding principle with everything that we do. The way we engage with our partners, and the initiatives we launch, aim to stand out, to be professional and be human.

In the beginning, we only had the high-quality products differentiated Wörwag Pharma from other players. Thereafter, the results came once I had the chance to build and managed the team and adapt headquarters’ vision according to the need of the Romanian market. The team is the driving force behind the affiliate’s success, and this is because a lot of effort has been put into finding the right people. I chose them based on chemistry and shared ambitions. I have put a lot of emphasis on their happiness and make them believe that this affiliate is their own company. All these elements combined, have made Wörwag Pharma Romania what it is today. I am proud to say, that Wörwag is renowned in the market for the quality of its people, and the low turnover within the organisation.

What are some of the challenges that are shaping the industry in Romania?

In 2015, the organisation had to go through a restructuring and 25 percent of the employees were let go. Due to the quality of the medical representatives, within three months, 80 percent of them were already employed by other pharmaceutical companies.

This event crystallises several challenges within the market. The restructuring was due to the clawback which drove profitability down: it is an unsustainable burden for the industry. It is a symptom of a mismanaged budget and is not a viable solution for the future.

The quick pick-up of the medical representative is indicative of the lack of professionals in the market with licenses, but also the quality of Wörwag employees. Finding the right people with the right qualifications is a difficult task, as many educated professionals still leave the country. Furthermore, with recent salary increases of the doctors, medical representatives from pharma companies, leave the industry to practice medicine again even with private healthcare providers.

How does Wörwag Pharma go about to finding the talents?

In 2020, Wörwag Pharma Romania is planning to launch a program in collaboration with the few Faculties of Pharmacy to find and develop talents for the industry. This program will serve also as a gateway for students to discover new career opportunities, but also elevate the profile of the pharmacist. If the program is successful, the aim would be to launch it nationwide and let it run for at least three years. Ultimately, the program aims to increase awareness of the pharmacist's role as an educator/counsellor in prevention for consumers, as a healthcare professional, as a team member of patient care.

How can companies like Wörwag Pharma contribute to shaping a better environment and legislation?

Wörwag Pharma Romania is part of the Romanian Association of Manufacturers of Non-Prescription Drugs, Food Supplements and Medical Devices (RASCI), and we are happy that it exists. It is an active association that aims to improve the healthcare and pharmaceutical environment, by creating a unilateral voice. Furthermore, it has strong ethical codex which aligns companies around shared values and standardizes business practices in the market.

Currently, there is a push to implement a unitary law that will lead to proper information use for dietary supplements. There is a lack of education and legislation surrounding food supplements, OTCs and with the overloaded public sector, Romanians have become more proactive with their health. However, certain companies are mispositioning their products as sound alternatives to medicine, which can be harmful to the population.

Through the association and its initiatives, Wörwag Pharma aims to improve the environment and ensuring that legislation safeguards the wellbeing of Romanian patients.

For this year, are you planning to bring new products to the market?

All products in the medium and long-term that are coming to Romania are biofactors. Most of these will be OTC, as Wörwag Pharma wants to move closer to the consumer and act in different pathologies. Currently, there are four products registered and have three more in the pipeline that will be submitted in 2021-22. Wörwag's strategy in each country has been to position itself as the leading authority in biofactors in the field of prevention and treatment.

This year, Wörwag Pharma has launched a customer-centric program which aims to align all health stakeholders surrounding patients and consumers. This entails, bringing together our sub-distributors, pharmacists, doctors, and patients to enhance collaboration and communication.

What would be a milestone that you would like to achieve this year?

Last year in September, we launched the biofactor reputation strategy— “Thanks to Biofactors”— and this year we continued with the customer-centric program in the field of biofactor. Furthermore, I am curious to see the success rate of our student program and the results that “Thanks to biofactors” will produce.

From the distribution point of view, we are confident that this year will be a success and we do not anticipate too many hurdles. However, the unpredictability of the market is a challenge nonetheless but is something difficult to explain to our shareholders in Germany.

Despite the challenges, Wörwag Pharma Romania has a good track record and we intend to keep the trend going. The Romanian team is very ambitious, and my goal would be to move up the ranking to 22 and increase our market share to 1.5 percent. It will not be possible to go beyond the 20th place in the ranking, as Wörwag does not have the capacity for it.

What elements have made you stay with the company for so long?

In the past, I spent time doing my PhD in biochemistry of the skin in San Francisco, before coming back to Romania. However, I did not find my place anymore in the laboratory and this is when I decided to join Wörwag Pharma, as the first employee in Romania.

For the first year and a half, I was by myself and have built this affiliate up from the ground up. Each day is different, and there are a lot of opportunities in Romania, but it requires hard work.

What would be your advice to a new GM that is coming to Romania?

He/she should learn a lot and have the courage to try new things. There is a lot of opportunities in the country that are within reach but require a lot of creativity and hard work. If they start, they should be honest, have strong ethics, principles, and define the rules of the game from the start.

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