

Cătălin Radu - General Manager, Bristol Myers Squibb (BMS) Romania



Education and healthcare should be a priority of any country to make positive progress and must be disassociated from politics

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Cătălin Radu of Bristol Myers Squibb (BMS) Romania explains how the Celgene acquisition is allowing the company to provide their expertise on a larger scale. He reveals how BMS has become Romanian market leader in immuno-oncology by launching new indications and therapy lines for its products in the country. He shares his insights on how BMS has been successful in conducting clinical trials despite an overall downward trend in the country.

How has the acquisition of Celgene influenced BMS' operations?

The Celgene acquisition has been an exciting and important milestone for the BMS group as it is equally highly specialised which makes it a perfect fit. Consequently, coupled with the annual USD 10 billion investment in R&D from BMS, it will allow the company to provide the same services at a larger scale.

Celgene in Romania operates through a third party, and these contracts will be reviewed and repatriated into the BMS operations. The commitment is that any new brands that will be launched will be taken over by BMS affiliates, but now the Romanian affiliate has not taken part in the reintegration process, yet.

What have been your objectives since taking over the management in May?

My objectives have always remained the same and that is to contribute to the team, develop its full potential, and find a purpose. The pharmaceutical industry is a business but at the core of it are the patients. If we strive to fulfil our potential as a team, inadvertently we become important contributors to the nation's health. Consequently, my role is to optimize the impact we can have on the patients and the health ecosystem. This entails to create a link between our people and all our stakeholders, as well as translate our innovation and modus operandi within, in order to have positive results.

What makes this team successful is the integration of this process and the consistency in adhering to our three main pillars. We want the best people, not only when recruiting but also when we are developing them. Our campaign— "Who are you working for?" Patients—is our underlying value, and I am proud to say that people feel this when they are working here. Innovation is another pillar, and this does not only pertain to the new products and line treatments that we launch. It encompasses our approach and interactions with all our stakeholders, to find innovation and the best solutions for all of them. We strive for excellence and this is our trademark here at BMS.

Have you identified untapped opportunities for BMS in the market?

The scale and limitations of our reach must be considered, as BMS in Romania is a medium-sized entity. Hence, we devoted our energy to support global efforts to impact patient and physician engagement. Consequently, we received in 2019 The Global Engagement Award for our innovative approach for bringing physicians in the community together and sharing different therapeutic approaches.

Continuous Medical Education is a key element in Romania and is an area where we are working continuously to innovate. Therefore, we developed new interactive posters using conventional LCD posters that can be catered using QR codes and augmented reality.

How much of the global portfolio is currently present in Romania?

BMS is present on a modest scale and this is triggered by elements, such as the lowest price in Europe, late reimbursement, and price drops after patent expiry. These factors make it attractive for parallel trading but less so to be present in the market. Hence, it was a strategic decision to

focus solely on immuno-oncology portfolio, while still supplying patients that have historically been using BMS products for treatments. The organisation is the inventor of this therapeutic area, and in Romania, our products are considered to be the leader in the market, in that therapeutic market. This success came from the trust that our people have generated by understanding their role and being passionate about their work for the patients' needs. This positive momentum will continue for the coming period.

It is expected that our products shall be granted new indications and treatment lines. The big milestone this year will be a launch in first line renal cancer and hopefully, the reimbursement will follow shortly after.

Immuno-oncology changed the way oncology diseases are seen and treated. For instance, 1 out of 38 patients diagnosed with lung cancer and undergoing chemotherapy survived after five years. Thanks to immuno-oncology products, 1 in 7 patients survive, which is a five-fold increase in the Progression-Free Survival rate. These results drive people in BMS and give hope to those associated with the organisation.

This is inspiring, as you know that someone is alive because the message and the science behind the life-saving drug were delivered properly.

Are you planning to launch new indications in different treatment areas?

BMS in Romania has a broad spectrum of immuno-oncology indications that include lung, renal, melanoma, head & neck and Hodgkin lymphoma in first line or second-line treatment. In addition, we plan for the future to extend in even more therapeutically areas that will come from the combined Celgene pipeline.

Regarding our I-O portfolio, this year we plan to launch the first line immuno-oncology treatment for the renal cancer patients, and we hope for other indications to come soon.

How can BMS be a partner to key healthcare stakeholders in transmitting the importance of immuno-oncology?

The biggest hurdle in Romania is the underfunding of the healthcare system, which is below five percent of GDP compared to the European average of 9.6 percent. Education and healthcare should be a priority of any country to make positive progress and must be disassociated from

politics.

BMS as a partner is demonstrating its commitment by engaging in dialogues to find alternative sources of funding and make innovation more accessible to patients. Companies are economic entities, but turnover is a means to an end: it allows to bring more innovation and find new treatments to patients in need.

BMS was the first company in Romania to have a cost-volume agreement for immuno-oncology products –for melanoma patients– starting in 2017. The company remains committed to the Romanian I-O patient journey and will continue to find the proper solutions needed for our patients.

The affiliate invests extensively in education by organising round-tables discussions, stand-alone events, congresses and flying in world-class opinion leaders.

How does the community respond to BMS' initiatives?

BMS benefits of a significant amount of trust, when it comes to physicians and other authorities. This can be measured by an increased uptake of partners reaching out to the organisation in search of information and guidance. This is an indication that we have been successful with our initiatives.

The same can be said in with clinical trials. BMS' medical and clinical teams are increasingly being approached for advice and help, as we are inching closer to the FDA inspection. This suggests that there is trust and the quality delivered is outstanding. However, it is a big challenge, but BMS is committed to profiling itself and Romania as providers of quality in this field.

What is the scope of your activities regarding clinical trials in Romania?

To contextualize, the number of clinical trials in Romania have been decreasing in the last five years, due to a 30-week wait in the approval process, instead of the 8-10 weeks. Hence, between 2018 and 2019, the approved clinical trials have dropped from 400 to 150.

However, what BMS managed to do very well is catch up with the delay by preparing, engaging and working closely with all our stakeholders. Glad to mention that BMS Romania is a positive story for our clinical studies' regional hub.

Despite the successes, in Romania there is more to do in this field.

It is for our patients that we commit to scientific excellence and investment in R&D to provide innovative, high-quality medicines that address the unmet medical needs of patients with serious diseases and improve their lives.

Melanoma is a great example of a success story, having in place the first I-O clinical trial on this indication and the name patient program, which included the patients with unmet medical needs at that time.

What would signal you that you are inspiring your people and doing a good job?

I would love to be part of a team that would decline an offer and decide to stay. This would be the biggest achievement as a leader and indicate to me that I have the best people: happy and passionate about their work, for the patients. Other indicators such as turnover are the result of having the right people, doing the right things, and coming up with the right ideas.

If you could point to one thing, what would you want to achieve this year?

BMS is the leader in immuno-oncology in the Romanian market, and we want to continue to present the organisation as the most reliable partner in that field. In terms of tangible results, this can be translated into retaining the entire team by the end of this year. Together, we own BMS' success.

What has been your proudest moment with BMS so far?

There have been two instances which made me the proudest.

Internally, we did a great job as a team, joining efforts, truly being one voice and one partner for our stakeholders, which led to our success.

Externally, we received the global award which was a validation of everyone's hard work. The stellar performance was building up and culminated with this acknowledgement.

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