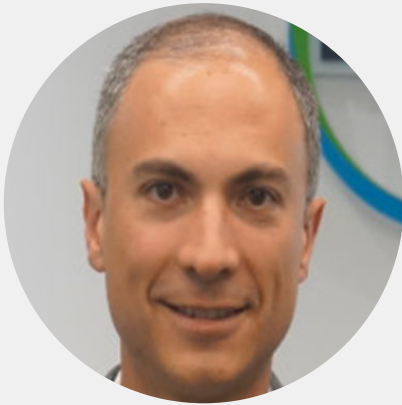


Jorge Levinson - Head, Bayer Pharmaceuticals Romania & Moldova



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Jorge Levinson, head of Bayer Pharmaceuticals Romania and Moldova, reveals his first impressions of Romania and the untapped potential it offers to the company. He shares his insights on how close-knit partnerships with the government, patient and medical associations are key and discloses his ambition to create an organisational culture that is unilaterally aligned with external stakeholders and which is true to Bayer

's mission: "Science for a better life".

Can you briefly introduce yourself and share your first impressions of the country?

I took over the position of country head of pharmaceuticals for Romania and Moldova in August 2019. This is the third country in which I have had the opportunity to lead our company bringing forward innovation and working towards improving the health of patients.

Every country has its challenges and opportunities, and I believe that Romania offers many opportunities. From an economic perspective, Romania is growing three times as fast as most other European countries with three to four percent (annual) GDP growth and its population is around 19 million, 40 per cent of which are aged between 30 to 50 years. With an increasingly ageing population, our innovative therapies will gradually benefit more patients.

Romania has a strong legacy in medical education, forming well prepared and competent physicians; this is a great advantage for patients. However, many highly educated physicians often seek opportunities for development abroad, which is leading to a deficit of professionals for the country. An important challenge is the lack of investment in R&D, which slows down access to further innovation.

How have you progressed with your initial objectives and have they changed since taking over the management?

My initial objectives have not changed and are conducive to Bayer's vision: to deliver innovative therapies and broaden patients' access to our medicines while further enhancing trust towards Bayer across all our partners and stakeholders. There are currently great new compounds in our pipeline which we expect to launch globally within the coming years and much work has to be done in Romania with the Health Technology Assessment (HTA) to improve approval timelines and bring these products to Romania more quickly.

As the third country you are leading for Bayer Pharmaceuticals, what is your approach when taking on the task to lead a new country such as Romania?

Each country is different. However, I always start with the regulations and assess what the opportunities and restraints are for operating, introducing new therapies, getting them reimbursed, and thus making them accessible to patients.

Here in Romania, the main challenge is visibility on timelines. By law, within 27 days, pricing and reimbursement needs to be approved, which is not the case. Hence, I find myself wedged between a German and a Romanian clock and must reconcile them.

How are you strategizing to internally manoeuvre through this environment?

We can influence and improve our partnerships and collaborations, both external and internal. By homing in on the affiliate's therapeutic focus and organisational strengths we can optimize these two areas and improve the odds in this environment.

Since the beginning of my tenure, one of my internal priorities has been to ensure that Bayer provides the highest standards of service to healthcare professionals and partners. To that, it is very important that our team is fully trained and knowledgeable about the medical specialties where we focus and that we use state-of-the-art tools to provide accurate and agile information to the scientific community.

Conceptually, science needs to be at the forefront of our discussions with healthcare stakeholders. This needs to be evident when closely collaborating with the government – whether that is having regular meetings with ARPIM or directly with the authorities – to address the concerns and move forward.

Perhaps it is a bit early to tell, but what untapped opportunities are available for Bayer in Romania?

There are great opportunities with our current portfolio. Our main focus areas in Romania are oncology, cardiology and ophthalmology. We have exceptional therapies that many patients around the world already benefit from, but in Romania patient access has taken a long time.

In oncology, an extension of a current therapy that is treating hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC) is expected to be launched this year.

Ophthalmology has a very promising future and we have a great product against retinal diseases to which we are seeking full reimbursement so that Romanian patients can benefit from it. In the cardiovascular area, we also have an exceptional product that can be used across multiple indications.

Are there any new and exciting drugs that you are bringing into Romania this year, or in the foreseeable future?

In addition to the three already mentioned therapies, Bayer will be launching an innovative cancer treatment that treats agnostic tumours regardless of where the cancer is situated. A patient with cancer triggered by a mutation in the enzyme neurotrophic receptor tyrosine kinase (NTRK) can be treated with this therapy. This representation of a truly innovative medicine has been commercialised in the USA one year ago and recently received approval in the EU. There are ongoing discussions to improve HTA approval timelines in order to give the Romanian patients the

opportunity to benefit from it, just like their European counterparts.

Bayer has a long legacy not only as a group but also in Romania with the first legal entity established in 1968. What is the importance of the Romanian affiliate for Bayer?

Generally, the German presence in Romania has always been strong, important and valuable. Romanians know and appreciate the value behind the Bayer brand. We want to keep enhancing the trust in Bayer – not only in general, but the trust of patients and physicians. The trust is based on our high-quality products and services, our open communication and high compliance standards.

What areas are driving the growth of the Bayer Pharmaceuticals in Romania?

The cardiovascular therapeutic area — spearheaded by oral anticoagulant to prevent atherothrombotic events — is the main growth driver for us in the country. Cardiovascular diseases have higher spread in Romania compared to the European average. And they are, unfortunately, among leading cause of death in the country because of the population's habits and lifestyle. The Romanian diet includes a lot of meat and high cholesterol food, while the culture of exercising is relatively low. Moreover, the age distribution of Romania's population pyramid shows that a high percentage of the population is at cardiovascular risk.

How can Bayer be a partner for healthcare stakeholders such as government, physicians, and patients to improve this health crisis?

Education and awareness are strategic steeples, and the company focuses on continuous medical education (CME). Meetings around the country with various associations, societies, and hospitals are organised to bring the latest therapeutic and product-related information. It is a setting where physicians participate and engage in discussions to improve the delivery of care to the country. Participation is outstanding, and Bayer's contribution is really valued.

What leadership style or corporate culture would you like to bring to the organization?

I am aiming at fostering and enhancing an open communication within the organisation and to promote an environment of trust and respect across all stakeholders – both externally and

internally. I want to assure everyone is aware we are committed to the Romanian society and, in keeping with Bayer's purpose, that we are bringing *"Science for a better life"*.

What would you like to achieve during your tenure?

Bayer is partnering with many cutting-edge companies to enhance its R&D capacity and output of life-changing therapies. Bayer's latest acquisition BlueRock Therapeutics is focused on engineered cell therapies and marks a major milestone for the company. During my tenure, I would relish launching innovation and science in Romania.

From a clinical trial and R&D perspective, Romania is underdeveloped despite increased demand from physicians for more experimental science to discover new therapies and grant early access. To contribute to the re-development of the clinical trial sector, would be a great achievement.

Jorge, you have extensive experience in diverse countries such as Spain, Ukraine, Morocco, and Iran. What keeps you motivated in this industry?

I am excited about all the opportunities that Bayer has to offer. It personally motivates me to see that with our work, healthcare physicians can further access science to improve the life of many patients. It is gratifying to know that every day the quality of life of many can be improved thanks to our therapies.

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