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Gabriel Cernica, general manager of Cegedim Customer Information and Cegedim Rx Romania, analyses the main trends shaping the pharmaceutical and healthcare environment in Romania and their effect on Cegedim's business. He also shares Cegedim's new product and service offering and how the company is tailoring them to specific stakeholder needs in Romania.

Could you start by introducing yourself and the activities of Cegedim Romania?

I graduated in Medicine from the Carol Davila University in Bucharest in 1990 and from 1995 I worked for various pharmaceutical companies until 2007, when I joined Cegedim. At that time, I was in charge of what used to be Cegedim Relationship Management, offering technology solutions and databases for the pharmaceutical industry. This activity was divested by Cegedim in 2015 and sold to IMS - now IQVIA. I spent one year with them and in 2016 I returned to Cegedim and took charge of the commercial activities of Cegedim Rx - our software company, here in Romania. In 2018 I was promoted to General Manager with the task of customising our offering to the Romanian market.

Cegedim has two companies in Romania. The oldest activity is conducted by Cegedim Customer Information, which surveys and provide data about the pharmaceutical market in Romania to pharma companies operating locally, for more than 20 years. So, we are talking about a business oriented towards the pharmaceutical industry. The second company is Cegedim Rx, which provides

software solutions to pharmacies and individual doctor's offices, targeting the healthcare sector.

What is currently driving the growth of the Romanian pharmaceutical market?

One of the fundamental drivers of growth is the significant unmet need in terms of pharmaceutical consumption in Romania. There has been some progress in terms of the reimbursement of new products and innovative molecules. The issue is who pays the cost of this growth. There is a high pressure on prices, which are tightly regulated in Romania.

In spite of the updates on the reimbursement list, there is a big out of pocket (OOP) consumption in Romania for prescription medication, especially now that the purchasing power of people is growing; for the same reason, the OTC market is developing very rapidly. Unlike in more developed markets in Europe, Romanians are used to paying for their medicines.

Which are the major trends shaping healthcare and the pharmaceutical industry in Romania?

The most important trends are the growing economy and the increasing purchasing power of the population. Both of these trends are key for the evolution of the pharmaceutical market. Even though the consumption of medicines per capita is still lower than the European average, we are catching up.

For the past 20 years, we have experienced high levels of uncertainty and volatility in terms of the legislative and regulatory framework, challenging all the players in the healthcare sector.

In this context, Cegedim is committed to the Romanian market. In recent years we have invested a lot in Cegedim Customer Information and Cegedim Rx, as well as on a third new Cegedim company called Cegedim Service Centre established in 2017, which already employs over 200 people in Romania - expected to reach 300 in 2020. This is a business process outsourcing company that does not work for our Romanian customers, but is rather internally dedicated to the Cegedim Group, providing services to other - mostly French - affiliates. We do share some business support services such as IT and Human Resources, but Cegedim Service Centre is a separate entity.

From this perspective, Cegedim Group finds Romania a very attractive market and our activities here are well established. We strongly believe in the positive evolution of Romania.

How is Cegedim addressing the legislative and regulatory volatility in Romania?

Luckily, Cegedim Customer Information, being an entity providing market data to the pharmaceutical industry, is not directly affected. Therefore, although volatility has some effect on our business, it affects us indirectly. This is a challenge for our customers rather than for us. Consequently, when we provide data related to market evolution, we always try to capture these market changes very quickly – as soon as they happen. We provide weekly updates on products which have been released onto the market so that our customers can react quickly.

Regulatory issues are more of a challenge for Cegedim Rx because our software solutions have to incorporate all the regulatory changes, which sometimes happen overnight. We have extensive experience and training to do this, and we manage to adapt our solutions very quickly because we understand that these are the tools that pharmacies and doctors use on a daily basis.

In May last year, Cegedim and Sanofi engaged in an innovative collaboration on Real World Data (RWD) for healthcare improvement in Europe. It was powered by Cegedim's proprietary THIN database with information going back to 1994 from several million individuals in France, UK, Spain, Belgium and Romania. What has been the impact of this collaboration?

This service was launched in Romania last year. We are trying to provide the accurate healthcare data of Romanian patients to both healthcare professionals and the pharmaceutical industry. The THIN database is a multi-country database that collects and consolidates data from a number of European countries. Cegedim is trying to extend the coverage of this database to other major European markets.

In Romania, the data collected is focused on the primary care sector. So far, our customers have received this new service with great interest. Locally, we already have a number of customers on this kind of collaboration and the feedback has been very positive. In the future, we plan to extend the coverage to patients in different therapeutic areas and key specialties.

Where do you see the growth coming from for Cegedim in Romania in the future?

Firstly, we will continue investing in RWD initiatives. This market segment has proven to be of interest for our customers and the healthcare sector in general.

Secondly, 12-18 months ago, Cegedim Rx launched the Base Claude Bernard (BCB), the first digital database of pharmaceutical products in Romania. The BCB is not a simple database, but a digital assistant for doctors to prescribe and pharmacists to dispense medicines in a safe manner. It was the first medication database to be certified by the French government's Haute Autorité de Santé (HAS) 20 years ago and is used daily by half of all healthcare professionals via their business software. After just one year in Romania, more than 1,500 healthcare professionals are already using this digital assistant service and we are confident it will be one of our main drivers of growth.

Thirdly, we are planning on gradually providing cloud solutions for our customers, which will mean easier and faster access to new versions of our solutions and more secure data.

Of course, we will continue bringing innovation and adapting our data and software solutions to the trends of the market. Some of the trends we have identified are the consolidation of the pharmaceutical retail sector and the growing segment of private healthcare services.

How would you define your leadership style?

I like to encourage people to make decisions on their own and to innovate. I am completely against micromanagement; I think that the strength of our company resides in the professional abilities of our team and in the capability of our managers to be self-sufficient.

What has been your proudest moment since taking on the leadership of both Cegedim Consumer Information and Cegedim Rx?

I am very proud of the transformation that Cegedim has gone through in terms of business model on the software business. We used to offer our solutions through a reseller network. For the last two years, we have invested a lot to gain control over the relationship with our clients. Now, we directly serve our customers, which has been an important change for the organisation. We have people all across the country, either in charge of commercialising our solutions or servicing our customers directly.

Lastly, I am proud of having been able to launch new products on the market. I believe all of them will be drivers of the future growth of Cegedim activities in Romania.

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