

Alper Alptekin - Managing Director Italy & AVP, Organon



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Organon Italy's Alper Alptekin introduces the newly formed women's health company, his priorities for the Italian affiliate, and how improvements in women's health can improve gender equality and give women the ability to be stronger, more vocal, and more independent.

Could you please tell us a little about yourself and your career?

I am originally from Istanbul and studied Business Economics at Istanbul Bilgi University before moving to Italy for my master's degree in Strategic Planning at the Polytechnic University of Milan.

Following this, I returned to Turkey and began my career at MSD in 2007 as a management trainee with the opportunity to work across different business functions. After two years, I became brand and customer manager and was in this role for four years. Subsequently, I moved to Ukraine as business operations lead reporting to the managing director for over a year and a half.

In 2014, I moved back to Turkey and worked through different roles as the national sales manager, franchise manager, business unit director, and market access director of MSD Turkey. After the announcement of the Organon spin-off, I was offered the role of managing director for Organon Italy. At Organon Italy, there are approximately 250 employees, which we call founders, of the affiliate. Globally, the company is worth roughly USD six billion.

What objectives did you have upon taking this new role?

My first objective, and the one of my Leadership Team, was to present Organon and its Vision to the world.

At Organon, we believe in a better and healthier every day for every woman. On June 3rd, 2021, we not only launched a new company but also a strong commitment to women, that is to carefully listen to their healthcare needs, enabling us to develop treatments tailored to them. We know there is so much more we can do for women and their health.

While focusing on the external positioning of Organon, we had the great task to reinforce our employees' engagement because they were shifting from MSD to Organon, a company with a completely different culture, values, and priorities.

Furthermore, we aimed to create a "safe" environment where employees could speak up to improve company performance and take more efficient and agile business decisions. This is the reason why we called our employees founders, because they act as entrepreneurs and felt, since the beginning, they owned the company.

As a result of this long process, the company's first engagement survey showed an Italian engagement score of 97 percent and highlighted that this percentage was significantly above the global average industry benchmark. I am very proud of this achievement.

On a personal level, did you consider it a risk to move across from MSD to Organon?

Making professional changes in life is never easy but, I was convinced by the solid purpose of the company, by the high level of the global senior leaders, as well as the new company's solid portfolio.

How is Organon's concept of human health represented in its portfolio of medicines?

Our portfolio of more than 60 products focuses on three pillars: women's health, biosimilars, and established brands.

In women's health we have three key areas: contraception, fertility, and menopause

Our biosimilars' portfolio is composed mainly of treatments for women's cancer and we strongly believe that these types of drugs will increase the affordability of the National Health System.

Last but not least, our established drugs are molecules, often first in a new class, that have revolutionized the therapeutic paradigm of some of the most important chronic non-communicable diseases, including hypertension, hypercholesterolemia, osteoporosis, asthma, migraine, and dermatology.

We are aware that a lot needs to be done to improve women's empowerment when we talk about family planning. Only 16 percent of fertile women in Italy use contraception and this causes important health, economic, and social consequences. For example, unplanned pregnancies still occur very often. We know that in Italy one in four pregnancies is unplanned and that 50 percent of them led to an abortion. There are around 76,000 legal voluntary termination of pregnancies (VTPs) with a cost of EUR 88 million annually, but we know that there are a lot of clandestine VTPs with high economic and health costs. All this can be avoided with the right use of preventive methods such as contraception.

Therefore, while Organon's portfolio is meeting the needs of women, it is not enough. Governments and policymakers realise that they need to have tangible projects and approaches to women as women's health is directly linked with a country's economy, GDP, and welfare. Thankfully, women have become a focus of government projects globally. This makes it easier for Organon to meet with policymakers to work together to achieve the mutual objectives for women.

What is Organon doing to improve its portfolio and treatment for women?

This is a crucial area of development for the company that requires work and investment. Our future areas of development focus on women's health and we have already closed four important global agreements with biopharmaceutical companies on pre-term labour, endometriosis, post-partum hemorrhage and bacterial vaginosis.

What role does Organon Italy have to play in terms of the larger organisation?

Organon Italy needs to be a strong partner to the country's government and policymakers. Especially after Covid, women are at the top of the political agenda. Organon has begun to meet with the government to create mutual objectives and the company is prepared to find the best way

to support women's health and women's futures.

The pandemic created another role for Organon. Published data indicates that women are suffering more during the pandemic and have been more likely to lose their jobs. The number of gynaecology visits during the pandemic decreased 54 percent which is directly linked to women's health. For four months in Italy, some IVF fertility centres were closed, meaning that female patients did not have access to fertility centres, and many did not have the chance to have a baby.

These are the direct negative impacts that COVID has had on women and Organon will be there to help the acceleration of support for women as we emerge from the pandemic.

How does Organon differentiate itself from its competitors?

Competition in the industry is healthy as it allows Organon to learn and increase its performance, leading to benefits for patients and physicians.

Organon believes it has one of the best and most complementary portfolios and has increased the number of employees working in women's health. Moreover, it will continue investing in women's health to be the best supplier for physicians and patients.

What is the scenario for biosimilars at Organon Italy?

This is a long-term vision of Organon, and the company already has two biosimilars on the Italian market.

Organon is committed to increase access to biosimilars through the launch of new therapeutic options and the consolidation of our position as a *partner of choice* in the marketing of these products.

We aspire to be the "Affordable Partner for Public Health" and we want to maximize the scientific, social, and affordable value of biosimilar products as a driving force to reduce the financial burden on the NHS and ensure high quality care for all patients who need it.

What are the company's internal priorities in the short term?

While Organon may not be able to become one of the top companies in Italy regarding financials in the short term, it stands out in terms of productivity, efficiency, and the well-being and development of its employees. Organon's mindset is to continue to grow with selected investment that can increase profitability and top line.

What is Organon's approach to research and innovation in women's health?

Organon's objectives extend beyond the research and innovation of new drugs to include approaching companies that are not able to commercialise innovative drugs themselves and acquire them. For example, Organon acquired Alydia Health last year for its Jada System that provides control and treatment of abnormal postpartum uterine bleeding. This unique product that will be launched at the end of 2023 stops the haemorrhage in two minutes rather than two days. Furthermore, Organon wishes to combine technology such as smartwatches with its focus in healthcare to deliver on its objectives in women's health.

Do you have any final messages for our readers that may not know about Organon?

Organon is a unique company with the mission to improve gender equality and give women the ability to be stronger, more vocal, and more independent through improvements in women's health.

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