

Charles-Henri Bodin – General Manager, Pierre Fabre Italy



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Pierre Fabre Italy's Charles-Henri Bodin highlights how the French firm's offering has expanded far beyond its dermo-cosmetics heritage to today encompass a wide range of pharmaceuticals, including the key growth area of oncology. Bodin also outlines the importance of Italy – one of PF's first international affiliates – to the global group, and gives his thoughts on digitalisation, patient-centricity, and sustainability.

Can you introduce yourself briefly and tell us about your vast experience in the Italian market?

I have been living in Italy for 13 years and working for Pierre Fabre since 2000. Initially, my mission in Italy was as CFO for both dermo-cosmetics and pharmaceutical products. After a while here, I had the opportunity to venture into the commercial part of the business as General Manager, particularly in specialty care. During my time here, I have been able to do many things, which is part of the reason why I stayed in Italy.

Pierre Fabre is widely known for two things: its dermo-cosmetics products and for being French. Would you agree with this statement?

Yes, it is true that people associate the brand with cosmetics. Still, I find that to be incomplete because Pierre Fabre is a company celebrating its 60th anniversary this year, and it all started with Mr Fabre's own pharmacy in a small town in France where he developed his first medicine. At the time of Mr Fabre's death, the company's turnover was already over EUR 2 billion. Thus, Pierre Fabre started in the pharma industry. Later, in the 1980s, with Mr Fabre's innovative ideas and vision, it branched out into the dermo-cosmetics sector, offering products based on natural ingredients. Both aspects are historically very important for the company. We also do not view ourselves as a purely French company, as we have a huge presence in more than 100 countries around the world, such as China, Korea and many other countries in Europe and South America, where we are a key partner in the industry.

The company separates its dermo-cosmetics and pharma operations to better cater to each target group's needs. Last year, Pierre Fabre's profits were EUR 2.5 billion and 45% of that was from the pharma division. We have seen an increase in turnover of the pharma division worldwide.

How important is the Italian affiliate within Pierre Fabre?

The Italian pharma subsidiary was among the first created by the company, which makes it now a sizeable market where we employ over 150 people and have a turnover of approximately EUR 53 million, making Italy one of the top 3 affiliates for Pierre Fabre.

What would you say about Pierre Fabre's portfolio and the importance of oncology, an area where competition from large pharma companies is very fierce?

Our portfolio includes specialisations in dermatology and urology, accounting for two-thirds of our sales, however, oncology is our main growth driver. For this reason, we are focusing on the oncology area. Even though we are a mid-sized company, and the competition is tough, we are working very hard to achieve this success. We paved the way for this in the 1990s with chemotherapy drugs that are still being used today. Our history has helped us to compete with the giants and gain a strong position with physicians and patients alike.

In April 2022 we launched a small molecule, a targeted therapy used for the treatment of metastatic colorectal cancer. Last year we launched a new formulation of chemotherapy cream to treat actinic keratosis, and the year before we came out with a combination of two small molecules, to treat metastatic melanoma patients. This shows that we have maintained a pace of one launch a year, which is a lot considering our industry. However, it has not been an easy task as the process from submission of reimbursement to the commercialisation of a product can take up to 14 months on average in Italy. In my experience, oncology products take unfortunately longer.

For one of these molecules, we have received a partial innovative status from the Italian Medicines Agency (AIFA), nonetheless, we have had to go through a long process including not only negotiations on a national level for reimbursement and setting of price but also to settle things on a regional level.

In addition to the therapies, our distinct approach is to put the patient's needs first and because of our expertise in dermo-cosmetics, we can go the extra mile to make them feel better as they recover. We aim to humanise the patient journey by making life easier in every way we can, be that digitalisation, dermo-cosmetics or just good care. We take our role very seriously, so much so that in 2021 we were recognised for our patient-centricity programs in which we supported a project called

â??Bersaglio Melanomaâ?• (Target Melanoma). It is a project that was created by the main four patient associations, with a board made up of oncologists, dermatologists and patients. The intention behind it is to identify critical steps or possible causes that can delay the diagnosis of Melanoma. The findings served as recommendations and were published by the patient association and shared with the authorities.

Another example of our â??patient centricityâ?• approach, is relative to our colorectal cancer therapy. When we were in negotiation with AIFA, we received a lot of requests from oncologists and patients. Therefore, we decided jointly with AIFA to make this innovative therapy available for free. Indeed, for two and half years the clinicians have been able to treat more than 600 patients within this â??early access programâ?•.

What can we expect from Pierre Fabre in the oncology area in the near future?

We have a very new cell therapy project that should be available in the near future. This breakthrough immunotherapy uses T-cells taken from healthy donors to treat a rare type of cancer or lymphoma that may occur after a solid organ transplant or allogeneic hematopoietic cell transplant. This is once again the result of a strategic collaboration between Pierre Fabre and an American biotech.

What are your thoughts on digitalisation? How well set up is the Italian healthcare system for digitalisation?

Digitalisation offers a great opportunity for Italy, especially with respect to the development of telemedicine, or telemonitoring of patients in order to bring therapeutics into a new era. Many pharma companies have realised this, and we have sat together to discuss projects and make some proposals to the Health Authority to push these innovations and evolve the system. We are open and ready for change and want to be a part of this transformation. Digitalisation should be inclusive; therefore we should work together with patients, physicians, companies and Health Authorities for better results, think bigger, and think of a system that is also aligned with the European Medicine Agencyâ??s decisions when needed.

Speaking of digitalisation, how did Pierre Fabre handle remote work during the pandemic? Would you say the companyâ??s objectives were still met â?? especially with those product launches?

At Pierre Fabre, we did not face so many problems, because when you have innovative therapies, teams are highly motivated and you can also recruit the best people with the right expertise and experience. Obviously, I would not say it was easy to launch new drugs during that time, but people were so enthusiastic about what they could do for patients that they quickly adopted the new technologies at their disposal to make things work remotely and have a successful launch.

How is Pierre Fabre keeping up with todayâ??s demands for sustainability and corporate social responsibility? Is being a foundation something that sets you apart?

At Pierre Fabre sustainability has been in our DNA for a long time now. We have been recognised among the world's best employers in 2021, and we have scored a place in the top ten in the Pharma industry ranking. But we will not settle for this, we want to reduce our water consumption by 20% by 2024, decrease our Co2 emissions by 30% by 2025, and to reduce by 25% our energy use. We are ambitious and want to do better, therefore we have set all these objectives.

It should be highlighted that our company is owned by a non-profit organisation, this helps us remain independent and be able to focus on patients. It also allows us to remain independent with respect to our finances, as Pierre Fabre has the capability to reinvest all the profit for research and development.

Is there anything else you would like to share with PharmaBoardroom's audience?

I am extremely pleased to be the general manager of Pierre Fabre because of the commitment our employees have to improve the quality of life of patients. We are targeting serious diseases and unmet clinical needs, especially in the oncology field. This passion is in our DNA as well as sustainability, and constant growth in order to care for every patient and make the world a better place. I think we have demonstrated this through our actions.

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