

Dana Constantinescu – General Manager, GSK Romania



From my experience, the Romania market is a challenging one, but it is full of opportunities

20.03.2020

Tags:

[Romania](#), [GSK](#), [Vaccines](#), [HIV](#), [Strategy](#), [CEE](#)

Dana Constantinescu of GSK Romania reveals the importance of the affiliate to the regional group and how vaccines and HIV are driving its growth. She outlines how the affiliate's portfolio reflects the global HIV portfolio and how it recently launched the 18th of the 22 vaccines GSK has. Constantinescu also shares her insights on the importance of public-private collaboration, how it has influenced the upcoming Vaccination Law, and why bringing new innovative products to Romanian patients and making GSK Romania the "Best Place to Work" are her main priorities.

What made you decide to join GSK and move away from the medical field?

GSK was at the forefront of shaping the image of pharmaceutical companies for the benefit of the patients. We have one of the highest levels of transparency and ethical standards, by continuously sharing our model with key stakeholders. 20 years ago, I was very inspired to join such an international company, which had a high investment and focus on innovative medicines that tackle unmet needs. As a medical professional, I felt that I could help more people by joining such an organisation.

From my experience, the Romania market is a challenging one, but it is full of opportunities. After joining the organisation, I have experienced that these are explored by the company either through its endeavours or through collaborating with the industry associations.

Today, GSK is part of the Romanian Association of Medicines Manufacturer (ARPIM), the Local American Working Group (LAWG), the American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham), on the board of the Foreign Investment Council (FIC) as well as on the board of IQVIA. One of the critical investments to date is facilitating access to innovation for patients to make their lives better and longer. As a global company, it gives GSK the advantage of applying different approaches and import know-how, that can benefit the local authorities in developing new strategies.

What solutions can companies like GSK implement to have sustainable growth despite the challenging market?

The patient is at the centre of each endeavour as they are in a constant need of treatment. It is very important for a challenging market like Romania, to be close to the physicians and the patients as to understand their needs. The patient associations have a strong voice in the country and are prolific in building platforms of communication, passing on their concerns, and requesting information to both authorities and pharma companies. These channels of communication are vital in shifting the company's focus on the needs of the patients and understand the local pressure points. This is an important factor considering that Romania has an ageing population.

How do you ensure that they have access to the latest innovations?

Through the various mechanisms that are used in different markets, GSK leverages on this know-how to build a case in the different associations to enhance its efforts in pushing for better access for patients. However, the underlying hurdle we see is the underfunding of the healthcare sector. Hence, GSK is trying to convince the authorities to invest a higher percentage of GDP in the healthcare system, as to reach a closer level to the European average. Additionally, through LAWG, we have launched an important project which proposed several alternative sources of financing inspired by other European models, to help the authorities decide.

How much of the global portfolio is present in the local market?

GSK Romania has representations in all the important therapeutic areas of the group: HIV, vaccines, antibiotics, central nervous system, dermatology, urology, cardiovascular and respiratory diseases. The affiliate has its strongest presence in HIV with the inclusion of the latest developed molecules, but also its heritage products. In the last 3-4 years, all the newest treatment in that line of therapy have been launched and are reimbursed so they are accessible to the Romanian patients. This year GSK is launching the last two therapies, recently reimbursed. With the addition of those pending products, the local affiliate is up to date with the global portfolio.

Where do you see the growth coming for the affiliate?

HIV and vaccines are the two therapeutic fields that are driving the growth of the affiliate and where we are foreseeing growth in the next years. Vaccines have historically been a key strength of GSK and it has a portfolio which is renowned throughout the world. For the 34 preventable diseases, GSK has vaccines for 22 of them. We are one of the largest providers of vaccines in the world but also in Romania, and this year the 18th vaccine for meningitis B was introduced in the country.

How does GSK fight against anti-vaccine sentiments and declining immunization rates in Romania?

GSK has been working together with the industry, experts and authorities to draft a vaccination framework. The Romanian parliament may enact the first vaccination law in the coming period. Within this law, some guidelines will increasingly structure the national immunization program as well as add more clarity in the interactions between the key stakeholders involved in vaccination: The Ministry of Health, producers of vaccines, physicians and parents. Inadvertently, this will grant more predictability in the national vaccines acquisition procedures and will regulate the supply of the recommended vaccines. Without gaps in supply, the vaccination cohort coverage can be maintained with safe standards. This will have a spill-over effect on the private vaccine market, but more importantly, it will also introduce the principles for a reimbursement system of certain risk groups. This is a major step for the country.

In Romania, the vaccine coverage for seasonal influenza is below the recommended target of 75 percent for the elderly. Vaccination is a major health issue, and this law will bring more clarity for the population that needs to be vaccinated, for the physicians, the vaccinators, the authorities, and the producers. GSK leveraged on its global network to put forward recommendations that are implemented in other markets. We hope that the Parliament will adopt proposals made by experts and that this law will follow the European Commission's recommendations. This is a first, and important step to future collaborations and paving the way to have predictable legislations.

What is the importance of this affiliate for GSK's regional presence?

Romania is part of the south-eastern region, and it is the most important country as it represents 40 percent to the cluster's business. However, the big advantage of this setup is the network. It allows GSK to share knowledge, discuss challenges and import solutions from other markets. The vaccination law is a good example, as GSK brought insights to the local Romanian authorities from this system.

Furthermore, the cluster system allows the various subsidiaries to share resources and capitalize on pockets of expertise in different segments. Inadvertently, it provides opportunities for upwards mobility, as more than 40 Romanian colleagues have taken a regional and wider role through the GSK network.

In which direction do you want to lead this affiliate in the coming years?

The main goal is to constantly improve market access and bring new innovative products to the market. These products will be available at a certain pace, aligned with the regional and global strategy. However, I will make sure that all efforts and energy is spent by improving the environment and increase accessibility to life-changing therapies for Romanian patients. This entails supporting the authorities in having constructive discussions and improving their assessment by providing real-world evidence.

As the first Romanian GM in 20 years, I feel there is an additional responsibility to ensure that this is happening for my patients.

What are your objectives for this year?

Within the umbrella of improving access, my goal this year is to assure that the three new products in GSK's portfolio are available and reaching Romanian patients. Also, one of my priorities is to make GSK Romania the best employer in the market. Globally, GSK is focused on making the company the most innovative, performant and trusted. Becoming the preferred modern employer is part of achieving this strategy on a local level, and I managed to implement a lot of things in the last two years. For me, to continue learning is a critical driver: career guidance that outlines the role of each employee; the importance of learning every day to become the best in the current role as well as for future roles are things that we consistently foster. There is an open-door policy enacted for anyone who wants to discuss their pathway or needs advice. Additionally, we invest a lot in supporting self-awareness, wellbeing, work-life balance, and in soft skills trainings to help each employee reach his/her potential.

What unique qualities do you bring to the affiliate?

I am trying to be very open with all my colleagues, not only the leadership teams. Open and honest conversations every day. Things move rapidly in Romania, and not everyone has access to the same amount of information. Hence, I focus on constantly providing information to my colleagues so that everyone is aware and feels included. People are the company's biggest asset, and only if everyone is on the same page, we can make a difference. By entrusting them with knowledge and giving them the feeling that people are acting upon it, has made a big difference in the last couple of years.

What have been the proudest moment since leading this affiliate?

My proudest moments are during our company gatherings and when I get to see all my colleagues. More specifically, it is when they share with me that they feel good being part of GSK's team, that GSK is a trusted company, that they feel included and feel proud of the impact GSK has. This comforts me that I am doing the right thing, and this gives me the energy to strive further.

[See more interviews](#)
