

# Interview: Fabrice Barbu – General Manager, Servier Tunisia

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“Attaining our financial objectives also lies in the recruitment of the best talents available.”

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*Fabrice Barbu, general manager of Servier Tunisia, discusses how Servier wants to build a strong presence in the oncology field in Tunisia and is currently investigating the possibilities of bringing its generics to the market. He also explains how local partners and highly proficient human resources have contributed to the affiliate’s success in the cardiovascular and diabetes segments.*

## **Could you expand on Servier’s presence in Tunisia and its dedication to Tunisian patients?**

Servier’s international ambitions are what has attracted me to the company. Since then, I have stayed because the company cherishes its human resources and promotes their development. Our presence in Tunisia dates back to the establishment 16 years ago of a scientific office in charge of commercialising the products of Servier in Tunisia. Five years after opening this scientific office, Servier established an affiliate in Tunisia.

16 years ago, Servier was among the first international company to host a Servier’s affiliate in Tunisia. I would assume this is linked to the French and Tunisian historic ties. Despite Tunisia’s increased market complexity since the revolution in 2011, Servier remains committed to the Tunisian market. For instance, the share of products manufactured locally stands at 30 percent of our revenues and I intend to increase this number to around 50 percent in the next three to five years.

Let me give you some examples to show you how Servier contributes to improving the health of Tunisians. Heart Failure is a huge burden for the Tunisian healthcare system and a huge unmet need for clinicians. Servier developed an innovative treatment Procoralan® and brought it to

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Tunisian market to improve the prognosis of these patients. Moreover, Servier has been committed to organize conferences and sharing best practices between cardiologists in order to improve the way to treat the patients affected by this severe disease.

Diabetes is one of the most common chronic disease in Tunisia and again a huge burden for the country. 4 years ago, Servier brought to the market Diamicron 60<sup>®</sup>, one of the gold standard treatment for diabetic patients.

We can also mention Daflon<sup>®</sup> that takes care of patients suffering from hemorrhoidal disease and chronic venous disorder.

Also, the French headquarters are still strongly involved and committed to facilitating the access of innovative treatments to the Tunisian market.

### **What is Servier's current position in the Tunisian pharmaceutical market?**

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Servier's internationalisation strategy, based on innovation and local partnerships, has allowed it to establish a remarkably strong presence in the Tunisian market, most notably in cardiology and diabetes therapeutic areas. As a matter of fact, Servier ranks within the top three companies in these two therapeutic areas and our diabetes products have been among the most prescribed in Tunisia since we established a foothold here.

Servier also decided to reinforce its market position by developing strong collaboration with a Tunisian company, Teriak. Teriak, our partner manufactures and distributes 5 of Servier's drugs and most recently Diamicron 60, our best-selling product in the diabetes field. Our partner has a strong portfolio of molecules that complements ours well, for this reason, further synergies are likely in the future.

### **Which areas are you looking forward to developing?**

Bring innovation remains at the heart of Servier's activity. In January 2018 we will be launching Natrixam<sup>®</sup>, a unique therapy for which we obtained market approval in the middle of the year 2017. This bi-therapy both decreases patients' blood pressure and has a proven track record of reducing the risk of stroke. Indeed, patients who suffer from high systolic blood pressure have an increased risk of having a stroke.

The development of our product portfolio is also oriented towards oncology and generics. It was only recently that Servier decided to enter the oncology field in Tunisia. We have just applied for a marketing authorisation for a product aimed at colorectal cancer. I feel that this is an extremely promising product, offering patients and clinicians a new option in this disease. This first step will most certainly help us become a player in the Tunisian oncology field.

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Biogaran and Egis, leading companies in generics fields, are both full subsidiaries of Servier. Also, we are starting to consider the generics market in Tunisia. Indeed, most of the generic versions of products in the country are produced locally. Furthermore, this segment of the pharmaceutical market is highly competitive and prices are driven downwards; nonetheless, it is a growing segment. We will have to find a way to investigate the right price positioning for our own generics (Biogaran and Egis) and we have also to consider potential local partnership.

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Additionally, Servier's product portfolio in Tunisia can be reinforced by any of the innovations developed by our R&D. These innovations are usually brought to the market from our factories in France or developed in collaboration with a partner that is well versed in the market's conditions and is well established in the country. Servier brings the scientific expertise of its products and the local partner helps determine which elements should be included to facilitate the access to the market.

On a side note, the National Laboratory for the Control of Medication (LNCM) has made tremendous improvements in reducing the marketing appraisal times. Indeed, before 2013 the process could have lasted up to four years, but it has now been reduced to one year. These improvements are linked to the government's understanding that importing innovative drugs is as important as supporting the local production of generic drugs.

### **What are Servier's financial ambitions, and how do you aim to achieve them?**

Globally, Servier is looking to bring its revenues to EUR five billion (approx. USD 5.9 billion) in five years. Therefore, Servier's employees in the Tunisian affiliate, like all the others in the world, are working towards this global goal.

However, the recent patent cliff some of our products have reached, and the extreme devaluation in Tunisia, call for a redevelopment of our portfolio. Therefore we are looking to launching new categories of products in Tunisia. In fact, we will be launching cardiology and oncology products among other innovations. In doing so we hope to compensate for the losses associated with the arrival of the generic equivalents of our originators on the Tunisian market.

Another way to reach this target is to bring our own generic, and explore new synergies and partnerships with local partner.

### **How do human resources contribute to Servier's development plan?**

Attaining our financial objectives also lies in the recruitment of the best talents available. Therefore, in parallel with our portfolio development, I wish to concentrate on the quality of the human resources we bring on-board our projects in Tunisia. Having adaptable collaborators should help us successfully implement the strategic decisions I just mentioned. Moreover, in this changing and challenging environment I ask and help my employees to dare to innovate and be committed to succeed.

Our collaborators are highly proficient and regularly trained in their domain. As a matter of fact, all our medical delegates are pharmacists, doctors or vets. Having people well versed in the field of the scientific and medical side of the pharmaceutical industry greatly facilitates the awareness for our products. Indeed, they can answer most of the doctors' questions and clearly explain the positioning of our products. I reckon the replication of such a system in other markets could help us achieve our global financial objectives.

### **How does Servier contribute to the development of Tunisia's pharmaceutical industry?**

Servier is an active member of the Sefhira, an organisation whose role is to promote the innovative companies operating in Tunisia. More specifically, the Sefhira engages with the Tunisian health authorities to help multinationals valorise their innovations at the right price. Recently, Sefhira organised a conference. We were looking forward to define clear market access guidelines, such as a list of indicators taken into account by the government during the pricing decision.

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Also, Servier is an active member of Club SantÃ© a group of French companies whose role is to emphasize the added value of the French and Tunisian partnership in the Health field.

Another aspect is the way I want to work with our partners; While partners could simply have been used as distributors, we want them to benefit from technological transfers. Therefore, rather than assigning them to building the marketing authorisation file, we actively involve them in the manufacturing process. . People from Servier's plant come in Tunisia and stay for several weeks in the plant of the local partner to make sure the new manufacturing process is well transferred. This way of working with our partner Teriak is likely to explain the success of our collaboration.

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