

Interview: Hande Demirdere – General Manager, Pierre Fabre Turkey

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Hande Demirdere, general manager of Pierre Fabre Pharma in Turkey, sheds light on the affiliate’s impressive 93 percent growth in 2017 while highlighting where to target development opportunities in the dynamic Turkish market. In this interview, the experienced General Manager discusses the advantages of diversifying strategies, Pierre Fabre’s comparative advantage among traditional MNCs, and the competitive urology landscape.

What first attracted you to take on the role of general manager at Pierre Fabre?

Having led international sales teams across different geographies, and off the back of my success strategizing and implementing a significant transformation of the Takeda affiliate in Turkey, Pierre Fabre Turkey approached me. They highlighted their intentions to perform a similar transformation expanding and growing their affiliate.

The third-largest French pharmaceutical laboratory, Pierre Fabre Laboratories are specialized in pharmaceuticals, health and dermo-cosmetics. Pierre Fabre Pharma has been present since 2003 in Turkey, with ten employees promoting oncology products solely. Last year, Pfizer and Pierre Fabre entered a deal on a urology product in light of our extensive research and strong reputation across the globe. In Turkey, however, we had never been present in urology because the generic medicine entered the market before we were able to register our own original products.

Turkey is the third market for incontinence worldwide which is more than enough reason to implement a nationwide urology strategy which fits into the European plan to better tackle urological problems. Leveraging our network in the industry, we quickly formed within only two months a new team of 36 experienced and hardworking professionals in order to establish a competent primary care team which would take care of these products. Today, we visit urologists, gynecologists, and family practitioners across Turkey to promote our three lines of operations but primarily incontinence.

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What is Pierre Fabre’s consumer healthcare offering in Turkey?

Our consumer healthcare unit is well-recognized worldwide, particularly in oral care. We are often Number One in France, Portugal and African countries for our products in these segments. We have a team of seven to tackle consumer healthcare in Turkey, especially oral care.

Across all therapeutic areas, we offer very diverse portfolio from consumer health care to primary health care and specialty care such as from medico-cosmetic products (toothpaste etc); food

supplements (cranberry etc.) or medical device (dry mouth treatment etc) to highly specialized medical products in oncology, we provide a broad portfolio with constant launches of new products. The structure is fluid, and we consistently enhance the nature of launches to market our products better.

Overall, even though the pharma sales team is currently composed of 50 members, they are backed by a strong office of 40 who support both pharma and dermo-cosmetic branches.

How do these structural changes reflect Pierre Fabre's strategy in Turkey?

Pierre Fabre is continuously on the lookout for new opportunities and invests increasing sums into the Turkish market. Last year, we grew over 90 percent in Turkey. Our Turkish affiliate was the Number Three worldwide after the US and China, based on the business growth. Not only do we grow in terms of people, revenue, and business, but crucially, margins. Our growth rate is mostly explained by our new launches in all groups, as well as sourcing opportunities for exciting products. In the meantime, our most mature products continue to perform well: even our iron products which have been present in the Turkish market for over 15 years continue to show remarkable growth. We were invited to Toulouse in January as a celebratory incentive, and all the top management were present including the Group Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Bertrand Parmentier for the meetings and the Gala Dinner. 2017 was a solid but prosperous year which lays the framework and foundations for this year.

What growth opportunities do you identify in Turkey?

Many companies across Turkey have saturated their offerings through repeated product launches and products that do not offer a complete solution to the physicians and patients. Iron deficiency, in contrast, affects one in three women across Turkey and therefore presents massive opportunity to serve patients better. In the meantime, even if our new arrival into oncology is relatively late, we know we can make a positive impact on the Turkish market.

Furthermore, we are selective and collaborative in the implementation of our portfolio. Pierre Fabre Medicament has over 2500 products worldwide and only limited number in Turkey. We have the opportunity to bring hundreds of new products to the country. Registering medical products requires excessive time, nevertheless, through meticulous selection and precise targeting, we can deliver the most relevant products to Turkey. For consumer health products, registration process is shorter, and we can enter the market readily, besides price is flexible and not under the control of the government's single-payer reimbursement system. Most significant of all, however, is that we promote consumer health in the primary care segment to physicians, despite these products' out of pocket status, and offer a new way of creating brand awareness for Pierre Fabre. In urology, for example, we promote cranberry pills, which are scientifically shown to help improve patient outcomes and can be bought over the counter in a pharmacy, upon advice from healthcare professionals.

What is the importance of partnerships for Pierre Fabre?

At an agreement level, one of my top priorities from the beginning was to scope out new locally produced medicines, particularly for the primary care team. We identified several local opportunities last year and are currently having final negotiations. Partnerships must be beneficial to both parties; for the most recent example, upon examining the financials and as market reactions evolved during negotiation, we realized that we could streamline our offering and integrate a new product from this multinational company by as early as January next year, in gynecology. In the grand scheme, we operate firm selection criteria, and are open to locals or MNCs.

On the global stage, Pierre Fabre has been collaborating with Array BioPharma on a unique combination product in oncology. The first indication received in the US is in metastatic melanoma, and particularly strong clinical data results led to almost immediate US FDA approval. We anticipate the reception of European approval in September this year, where we will continue to work on the researches for the indication for the treatment of colon cancer. The outcomes have been so impressive in favor of these products that they have been immediately included in the US guidelines because the results have shown a serious treatment progression for patients with metastatic melanoma. We are proud to be part of this partnership with Array BioPharma, and we anticipate that

this product will be blockbuster in the near future.

What is your vision for the affiliate for the next three years?

My goal is to create an environment at Pierre Fabre where the team is proud to come to work and provide better treatment options to the patients in Turkey. We work harder than an average company, and I think this already brings tremendous pride and satisfaction. Consequently, I want everyone in Turkey to know what Pierre Fabre stands for and that people inside and outside of the pharmaceutical world understand what a privilege and a source of pride it is to work at Pierre Fabre. We are a successful, professional and ethical company. The numbers and rankings will follow—and of course, we already see excellent progress in our growth strategy. If we look at our pace in the past year, stakeholders and professionals are already aware of our rapid growth. We are present in medical magazines, conferences and consistently promote our company as robust, dynamic and future-focused.

I am proud to be part of the Pierre Fabre family, noted for its long history and devotion to patients. Pierre Fabre is a specialist in botanical expertise; even our oncology products derive from tropical periwinkle from Madagascar. As a result, our oncology products create fewer complications and side effects such as less hair loss. Our high safety profile for products differentiates Pierre Fabre from other multinational companies.

In derma-cosmetics and oral care, we only promote to healthcare professionals and pharmacies, whereas we could sell in supermarkets or corner shops and engage in television campaigns, but we choose to stand by expert recommendations made by healthcare professionals, doctors, pharmacists and medical practitioners.

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What would be your final message to international readers?

The Turkish population is special for two reasons: not only do we have a younger demographic which continues to grow, but we also have an aging population which is growing three times more! This group needs more access to medicines and this is why we have seen organic and inorganic growth in our affiliate. Turkey continues to be an attractive ground for pharmaceuticals: due to its excellent population growth and increasing change in the mindset of Turkish people. Turkish patients are more educated and better informed on disease management, and Pierre Fabre invests more and more to serve these patients better. In the same vein, our team continues to grow to provide increased quality of health products and services to the Turkish patients.

In the meantime, one should acknowledge that the patients are truly at the core of the government's healthcare vision. For instance, the Turkish model of healthcare includes a special access program, which allows the Turkish Pharmacists Association (TPA) to import products from abroad, on an individual patient basis, before "reselling" them to the social security SGK. While requiring the approval of a dedicated scientific committee, this program aims to maintain access for Turkish patients to innovative treatments, even for products that foreign companies have not yet registered in Turkey. This remarkable access program has few—if any—parallels in the world and truly showcases the government's commitment to bolstering Turkish patients' access to innovation and quality health care.

In this context, Pierre Fabre's focus is truly on unmet medical needs: even simple but highly needed treatments such as our dry mouth products can dramatically increase the quality of life for the patients. Moreover, our urology range can positively impact the lives of patients through a simple change in life routine. As Pierre Fabre Turkey, we hope to continue this trend and ensure that our patients lead a life with higher quality, while we will be investing and growing in Turkey with existing and new products.

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