

Interview: Jaap Heukers Managing Director, UPS Healthcare Italy



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Leading in some areas, lagging in others, the Italian healthcare logistics sector is on the brink of change according to UPS Healthcare's managing director for Italy, Jaap Heukers.

Each country has slightly different interpretations of certain regulations and compliance, given their unique regulatory development path. Coming from a global international perspective what do you see as some of the differences, the unique interpretations of compliance?

In some ways, Italy is ahead of the game, while in others we see a time lag. For example, if we take the March 2015 EU GDP directive, it will only be fully implemented once it is signed as a law in Italy. On the other hand, in Italy it is already mandatory to do all transportation of active ingredients using active temperature controls, which is a much stricter requirement than seen in some other countries. Direct to patient deliveries also provide a relevant example, as we see countries like the UK have strong home delivery systems and companies in place, while in Italy this is really just beginning. Right now we are organizing a workshop with several pharma industry players to start a more intense discussion with ministry of health officials regarding what the best path forward for developing direct to patient services might be.

UPS is active globally, and has a global compliance office and global compliance services. How does this distinguish UPS from companies that work in only a single market?

First of all, our global experience, reputation and brand mean that our clients know that we take compliance seriously, in all situations. Compliance is not just a word, it means you need to have protocols, processes, and audits in place, and to be flexible and adaptable when necessary to maintain compliance in tough circumstances. UPS's global infrastructure, experience and framework makes a real difference in the way we operate, and the level of reliability and service we can offer. In a very tangible way, as a global company we are able to leverage our experience from other countries, taking solutions developed in the Netherlands or UK for example, and implementing them in Italy.

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Another aspect is in terms of our organizational structure and culture. UPS is fully oriented towards ensuring that our personnel all learn from one another and really understand what is required in terms of compliance and quality assurance. As such our compliance and quality assurance teams are all managed as one organization and all talk to one another, and are aware of the differences in the rules that logistics are subject to on either end of a shipment. Our commitment and investment in training is also critical, as it is essential that everyone involved in the logistics chain understands why things must be done in a certain way, and then following up with compliance testing to ensure that the training is in fact acted upon. One of the strongest slogans we have at UPS is that "it's a patient, not a package," and the moment our employees really internalize this message is the moment that they understand why it's so extremely important that we follow regulations regarding temperature management, packing and handling without deviation.

We also work with clients on supply chain optimization more generally, finding ways to reduce the time between an order date and delivery; this means going through every step of their processes and ours including their IT infrastructure to find areas where we can utilize our experience, knowledge and resources to help improve performance. Often times we find that many companies focus too much on the final steps of supply chains around warehousing and delivery, while significant gains can often be made further up in organizations; such networks often span multiple countries, and UPS's global reach and integrated nature enables us to work with the entire scope of such challenges.

Do you have any examples of best-in-class solutions that have been brought to Italy via this strong internal UPS network?

A key area we have focused on as UPS Italy has been passive packaging. As UPS we are in touch with many leading global experts and work with regulators around the world, and know very well the passive packaging requirements or restrictions in each country, and the evidence and rationale behind each of these policies. With this experience, we are communicating our experience in other markets with the use of passive packaging to stakeholders in Italy, to see what role passive packaging solutions might play in Italian healthcare logistics in the coming years.

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Another area where we have pushed the boundaries of the Italian healthcare logistics industry so to speak has been by implementing advanced mechanization to our warehouse here, which has helped to optimize the quality and speed of our services.

Looking forward five years, what changes do you expect to see in the Italian healthcare logistics field?

I certainly see home care and home deliveries as areas that will see significant growth over the coming years. Currently the market is rigidly forced into pharmacies, wholesalers and hospitals, and

these are the main channels in need of delivery solutions. That has started to change significantly in other countries, and I expect we will see Italy take significant steps in this direction over the next few years; UPS is in fact actively working to raise awareness of the benefits home deliveries can bring by organizing workshops on this subject.

We will also see a number of trends continue; more and more shipments will be requiring controlled temperature shipping, particularly in the 2 to 8 degree bracket. We will also see growth in shipments of medical devices, and particularly of loner kits used to implant certain medical devices, which are often shipped from the manufactures facilities to a specific hospital to be used during just one procedure, and then returned; this must of course be done in a completely controlled manner, and under significant time pressure.

For UPS as well we have to ensure that our organizational structure fits the environment, the needs of our clients, and our expectations for how our business will evolve. Right now we have our largest warehouse in Rome and a smaller one in Milan, and this may not be the best set up for the future. Italy has a lot of pharma and MedTech manufactures, who are concentrated in the North, and thereâ??s a lot of demand for imported products in the North as well, so it may make more sense to have a bigger campus in the North relative to the south. So some changes may be made in the next few years.

Perfect. Then perhaps as a final question, if we look at you and your clientele what would you like the Italian executives of pharma and med tech industry to think about UPS?

To me, I think the important thing is compliance and reliability, and the attitude with our slogan â??itâ??s a patient, not a packageâ??•embodies. This really summarizes everything we want our Healthcare business to stand for.

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