

Interview: Joanna Drewla – General Manager, Servier Poland



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Joanna Drewla, general manager of Servier Poland, discusses Polish healthcare challenges and looks at areas for improvement to create a sustainable balance for market access of innovative treatments. Furthermore, she highlights the strategic importance of Servier in Poland, with the International Center for CEE clinical research and the company’s fifth largest production site.

You started your career at Servier Poland, and returned as the general manager in 2014, after many years working throughout various markets. Thus far, how has the experience been?

Coming back to Poland after ten years abroad was a different experience as the pharmaceutical market has changed significantly. The Polish healthcare market is quite complex, and it is of paramount importance to engage with key stakeholders to fully understand the healthcare environment and navigate the market effectively.

The 2012 reimbursement act was designed to improve the transparency and predictability to the Polish healthcare market – although – there is still a need to perfect it further. For example, pricing and reimbursement negotiations taking place every three years are extremely challenging and it makes it difficult to forecast the future and set up business plans for upcoming years.

Historically, Servier is a cardiology-based company. How is the portfolio portrayed in the Polish market?

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We are basically a cardiology company in Poland, with around 55 percent of our revenues generated within the cardiovascular disease area. This is mainly in hypertension, coronary disease and heart failure. In fact, Servier's prowess in this therapeutic area is clear as we have been awarded by the Polish Cardiac Society 15 years running as the premier partner of Polish cardiology. We work with the association to educate the Polish healthcare community and overall population about cardiovascular disease.

Diabetes makes up 16 percent of our turnover, and we have well established and respected products in this area as well as an interesting pipeline in development. Furthermore, we have respiratory and oncology lines, and two anti-depressants on the market – one of them achieved reimbursement last year after five-years negotiations, illustrating the challenges in the Polish market to promote innovation.

How can Poland find a balance between innovation and sustainability?

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Firstly, in the Polish healthcare market, we need to improve the effectiveness of money spending. Secondly, the pharmaceutical budget remains up to 17 percent of overall healthcare spending, and does not rise, despite the ageing population and cost of new drugs entering the market. There is a necessity to present the holistic view of the healthcare system and not disconnect drug budget from other expenses

What advancements are being made for Poland to receive Servier's latest oncology products?

This will all depend on reimbursement. Nevertheless, we have managed to gain market entry for our first ever oncology treatment in Poland – a completely new experience for Servier Poland. This is for our rare indication for non-Hodgkin's lymphoma that Servier obtained the rights to distribute in several EU countries under an agreement with CTI Biopharma.

What is the current scope of clinical operations for Servier Poland?

In 1999, a small office for Servier in the CEE was set up in Poland to monitor clinical trials, and because of the size of the Polish market and the available patient population, the company's international center for clinical research was established. This year it has become a hub for clinical studies for Slovakia, Czech Republic, Ukraine, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania, with the potential to expand in the future.

We have a long history of cooperation with local clinical centers and local clinical experts. Many of these experts take part in international studies' management boards which reflects their expertise.

The International Center for Clinical Research has recently started to initiate studies in oncology. In fact, Poland has some of the lowest access of innovative drugs in the EU within the oncology field, considerably less than Germany and the UK. Therefore, patients are more willing to enter trials as it may be the only way to receive innovative treatments within their cancer class.

The company is very active in establishing R&D partnerships, even at a domestic level. How well prepared is Poland to be part of the company's collaboration process?

If we discover an interesting proposal that fits within our defined scope of interest, we will pass it onto our business development team in the head office. This is not just for drugs, but supportive

medicine that looks at a holistic approach. For example, Servier Poland will be testing shortly Cardio-Skin, a t-shirt that measures the electrocardiography (ECG) of the heart for an extended period of time to detect conditions such as atrial fibrillation. Furthermore, we are looking to engage with e-health start-ups as Poland is very strong in the digital sector.

Servier is a pioneer in the Polish pharmaceutical manufacturing landscape. How important is the production conducted in Poland for the company globally?

Poland is home to the company's fifth largest production site globally. Initially designed solely to produce treatments for Poland, the site now up to 45 percent of produce abroad, mainly to the EU. Our production team is extremely efficient, and we are continually investing in the site, with roughly 150 million PLN (42 million USD) being invested in recent years.

Also, we are looking to expand our contract development and manufacturing operations (CDMO) and are constantly looking for external partners. Our ability to be price competitive, while maintaining high quality is a huge advantage as we look to win production tenders from HQ and be the premier partner of choice for external partnerships.

What is the strategic importance of Servier Poland for the company globally?

We are a top ten-market for the company globally in terms of turnover., therefore the Polish market is very important for Servier. This is confirmed by continuous investment in R&D and towards our production capabilities. A good example here is the recent opening of our quality laboratory, that will serve not only the local needs but also those of external partners. We plan to increase production capacity to 32 million boxes this year from which 50 percent will be exported to European countries.

What social activities is Servier Poland undertaking to integrate themselves within the community?

We are uniquely known in Poland as a company that is very engaged in education. Firstly, since 2003, we have been undertaking "Servier for the Heart"; a social campaign that has already conducted medical examination and consultations for 70 thousand Polish patients. This is extremely important as in many places waiting times to see a cardiologist can reach up to six-months.

Secondly, we are active in the fight against depression, an area that is still stigmatised in Poland and more prevalent than ever before. We conduct social activities and enable free advice to Polish people in need.

Lastly, in Servier's new field of oncology we are undertaking the activity, "Switch off the Cancer". This is a mobile diagnosis tool that does basic screening and provides education for colorectal cancer, the second largest cancer killer in the world.

All in all, we see these social initiatives as a long-term movement that helps shape Servier's image with the key stakeholders. This is bolstered by the unique construction of Servier, as we are run by a foundation. This ensures the ability of looking in the long-term and putting patients in the centre of everything we do as an organization.

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