

Interview: Milena Stolpova – Country Head Commercial Business, Cipla Czech Republic



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The Country Head Commercial Business of Cipla Czech Republic reviews the challenges faced since Cipla began Czech operations two years ago, the company's expertise in the respiratory segment, and how high quality products have led to rapid success.

You have worked in pharma all of your life including for AstraZeneca, Ivax, Zentiva and LEO Pharma. Two years ago you decided to move from a rather sophisticated position into taking up responsibility to build up Cipla's operations completely from scratch. What was the rationale behind this decision?

The main reason for me to join Cipla and take on the challenge of building up its operations in the Czech Republic was the challenge itself! I was simply tempted by this task as a whole. What's more, Cipla is one of the leading companies in the respiratory segment which I found very intriguing as well! I started my career some 20 years ago with AstraZeneca and I was responsible for its respiratory segment too. At that time, I worked closely with many key opinion leaders in the Czech Republic and over the years I maintained my network and was more than happy to be able to utilize it once more and go back to my roots in the pharmaceutical industry. Besides the nostalgic value the respiratory segment has to me, I also felt that there was a lot of room for further business development in the Czech Republic and that I could lead Cipla to success by utilizing my extensive experience and implementing the right strategy!

What was the strategy you implemented to drive Cipla's respiratory business in the Czech Republic?

The first goal was to position Cipla in the mind of the relevant stakeholders as the leading company in the respiratory segment. The latter wasn't an easy task as many stakeholders were skeptical at first as an Indian company, generic and so forth so it was really about educating these stakeholders about the in-depth research and development, quality and reliability of Cipla. We needed to build up much needed relationships with the relevant regulatory authorities and associations and engage in the same educational process.

Reviewing the respiratory products available in Europe, one will see that the split between sprays and dry powder forms is even. However, in the Czech Republic 90 percent of inhaled corticosteroids (ICS) and long-acting β_2 -agonists (LABA) products were in dry powder form. So thirdly we had to educate about our devices and form used in the segment and again educate and convince. Finally, we were able to distinguish ourselves and gain market share via the differences in devices used!

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Just how successful was your strategy?

Despite the fierce competition with big pharma present in the Czech Republic, we were successful. Achieving success as a new player in the respiratory segment is not easy as one patient will not just switch if there are no side effects of the patient's current medicaments. Additionally, the majority of ICS+LABA products in the Czech Republic are fully reimbursed which meant we didn't have any co-payment advantage to utilize. Nonetheless, we were already profitable in the first year of being in the market!

In 2014 when you assumed position as Country Manager, the asthmatic treatment Fullhale was announced as the next big blockbuster on the Czech Market. How successful has Fullhale been in the Czech Republic and what were some of the challenges of bringing it to the market?

It took us close to two years to finally introduce Fullhale to the Czech market, then it took us another year to educate and convince doctors of its high quality and reliability! By now, we have very positive feedback from the medical practitioners in the Czech Republic. The majority of patients on Fullhale are newly diagnosed asthma patients.

Why was the Czech Republic chosen to establish Cipla's presence in the European market?

Historically, Cipla approached the European markets via distributors and license takers. A few years ago, it decided to change its approach to the European market and gain more control of its business here. Therefore, a couple of EU countries were chosen which would serve as the "first waves" for establishing operations; the Czech Republic was among those alongside other markets such as Germany, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia. Cipla started registering the different molecules within their respiratory segment in the markets and depending on advances in the registering process started operations in the countries one by one.

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and regulations and all products in the respiratory segment fully reimbursed by the system made it one of the best prospects. These unique combinations can't be found in any other therapeutic area or in any other country. The potential is still tremendous here and we will further tap into it and grow even further!

What is your future ambition for the affiliate in the Czech Republic?

I would definitely enjoy launching even more of Cipla's products especially in the respiratory segment to further grow Cipla in the Czech Republic in order to become a significant partner in the Czech pharmaceutical environment. I am confident that next year we will launch at least three more molecules. The latter is dear to me because we bring quality products at affordable prices and thus help all patients, the society and economy at large. Furthermore, I would like to strengthen our relationship with all relevant stakeholders, fully overcome the "made in India" stereotype and grow as operation!

What is the secret that led you to such a successful career in the pharmaceutical industry?

I am confident that I was successful in all of my professional endeavors by sticking to some core values: integrity, passion, courage and responsibility! This is what I hold myself accountable against because I believe these are crucial in life and business.

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