

Interview with Leona Mejzrová, Executive Director, Boiron Czech Republic

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Homeopathic medicines were prohibited during the communistic period, but found resurgence after 1989. Can you give us an overview of the development of this form of treatment in the Czech market, and speak about the role that BOIRON has had in the evolution of the segment?

Our Czech subsidiary was founded in January of 1998. I joined BOIRON in 2000, and was appointed head of the Czech market in 2001.

I am a pharmacist by training, and when I took on this role, I saw that in Czech pharmacies, homeopathic medicines were quite unknown. I was motivated to raise awareness about this form of treatment in our country. Homeopathy is a safe therapeutic method, which is efficient, natural, and has no side effects—even for vulnerable patient groups like young mothers, children, and seniors. The latter group, for example, tends to take a high number of medications, and it is quite safe to combine their classic pharmaceuticals with homeopathic remedies.

We are today still a small subsidiary: we have 28 people. However, I am very happy to have this job, and enjoy my everyday work very much. Our work is creative, and the outcome is worth our efforts. Our business is growing, and this growth does not come out of thin air—business is growing because homeopathic medicines are truly an effective form of treatment. BOIRON products are created through the utilization of very high-quality development and production techniques.

The image of homeopathic medicines has developed quite a bit in this country. Knowledge has increased considerably. However, even today, there are a high number of healthcare professionals that do not believe homeopathic products are true medications. Changing their opinion is a matter of continuous education. There is now a homeopathic association in the Czech Republic for doctors, offering courses and seminars to educate the medical community about the benefits of homeopathic medicines. This association collaborates with affiliates like the CEDH school in Paris, which is an excellent institution that has been on the market for 40 years. Every year, there is an increasing amount of graduates from the programs offered through this association.

It is very important for doctors to understand that homeopathic products are real medications. The regulations of the European Union recognize them as such; and here in the Czech Republic, our products are registered with SUKL, the drug authority.

As BOIRON, whom must we reach with our educational efforts? Doctors, pharmacists, and patients. We are working in each of these directions. We have a small team, but we work in close contact with health professionals. Within our budgetary limits, we conduct a variety of PR activities to reach the populace.

It is important for doctors to be aware of homeopathic medicines as a choice. I would not advocate that homeopathic medicines is the only effective therapy, nor that it is appropriate for all people in all cases. However, it is important that this therapy is an option.

There is a growing interest in the Czech Republic for homeopathic medicines; there is a demand now for more information. This demand, moreover, is not limited to general practitioners and pharmacists: midwives, physical therapists, and other healthcare professionals are gaining interest in homeopathic products. In the future, I would like to see the status of homeopathic medicines elevated to such an extent that our products will be partly reimbursed by the state—as they are, for instance, in France and Switzerland.

BOIRON today has 280 products on the Czech market. To what extent is this representative of your global portfolio?

The full portfolio of BOIRON is in the range of 3,000 products. In the Czech Republic, we offer only a relatively small part of the company's medicines. However, we must note that in BOIRON's home country, France, the company has quite an extensive history—70 or 80 years on the market. As a family-owned company, BOIRON has always tried to be very close to the French medical community, and offer products in all of the main indications that French physicians prescribe.

Noting this approach, my vision for the future is not to have 3,000 BOIRON medications on the Czech market. Rather, I want to have here all of the necessary therapeutics that will be valuable to medical professionals.

Moreover, it is very expensive to bring new drugs to the market, due to registration fees. We are not exempt from these fees, as our products have legal status as medications. There are other homeopathic products in the Czech Republic that are not granted medical status—these products are of questionable quality.

Having headed this subsidiary for 11 years, to what degree would you say that the company's development has been in line with your initial expectations?

BOIRON is today the leader in homeopathic medicines in the Czech Republic. However, our development has gone a bit slower than I thought that it would. This is due to legislation. Czech legislation is really quite strict—and different, for instance, even from Slovak registration.

I can give you an example: we are not permitted to denote the indications that our OTC medicines are used on their packaging. We cannot provide this important information on the label, as it has not been evaluated by SUKL. We have been working on this issue for several years, because we believe it is important that the people understand what the medication is effective for. We have been working with SVOPL and the Ministry of Health in order to change this situation, and we are seeing some success.

What would you like to achieve over the next five years of operations?

I have a very positive outlook for our development. Within five years, we will see that homeopathic medicines are an integrated part of the Czech medical framework—on par with other options. The people in the Czech Republic will be able to freely choose homeopathic medicines as their therapeutic method. Patients and healthcare professionals will be more aware of homeopathy's possibilities, and its limits. I think that homeopathic products will, too, be reimbursed—at least 30%! Not only are they effective, they are a low-cost option for the state.

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