

Stéphane Roques – CEO, Medicen, France



Through encouraging collaboration, France will be more competitive on the international level and can also make a difference domestically

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Stéphane Roques, CEO of Medicen, the health care cluster for the Paris region, discusses his vision for Medicen and the changes he has made during his first few months in the role. He

highlights the need for domestic and European collaboration to be able to compete against clusters in the USA and China but also Israel.

You were appointed CEO of Medicen just two months ago. What attracted you to the position and how did your skillset make you a good fit for this role?

I always had an interest in science and the R&D fields, and throughout my career, I have mostly been dealing with scientists, researchers and patient associations. I am convinced that it is an equation of behaviour, attitude and leadership to transform strong innovation into a successful product or solution. Hence, we need to boost the trust between the different players, which all have their own agenda but also a common goal. Through encouraging collaboration, France will be more competitive on the international level and can also make a difference domestically. This fascinating opportunity attracted me to work for Medicen.

I have always been very motivated by connecting people to work towards an ambitious goal. My vision, based on collaboration and ambition, is the reason why I am here. I am confident I will be able to bring with my team leadership to Medicen on the one side, but also lead with the other competitiveness clusters the development on a national level on the other side, as our main competitors are abroad. Hence, strong partnerships within France are needed.

Medicen is considered France's leading healthcare cluster and has the ambition to become one of the top 3 regions globally in personalized and translational medicine by 2022. How close is Medicen in reaching this goal?

We are very close to achieving this target, but we clearly need more efficiency and transparency within the French ecosystem, especially in related sectors, innovation, incubators and clusters. We tend to over-structure processes in France without eradicating previous inefficiencies. As a consequence, foreign investors find it difficult to invest in France because of unclear structures within the industry and apparent also -to be honest- sometimes real complexity. Therefore, our goal is to bring fresh air into this ecosystem to make processes simpler, more comprehensive and efficient. We want to regain the trust and the mandate of public stakeholders at the region and state levels, to then make Medicen a leading player in the health care sector.

What have been your main priorities during your first months at Medicen?

Personalized medicine of tomorrow is one of our key priorities. Medicen is aiming to help start-ups and researchers who are active in all fields of healthcare except treatment. This includes sectors like prognostics, diagnostics, imaging and mobile application amongst others. Biotherapy is another area where Medicen is very active in; covering the fields of gene therapy and microbiota. On the biotechnologies field – from design to production – we should accompany a national challenge promoted by Sanofi and other leaders. Then there is the sector which we call “Technotherapy”, which uses different technological forms of treatment except for biotherapy. The future of this industry will be dominated by a holistic approach, which combines these three sectors.

Hence the strategy I propose across these three fields is based on three pillars, namely promoting, structuring and animating. Promotion means quite simply to promote the Paris region to attract

researchers and investors. Animation is one of our key strengths, and it about connecting our multi-disciplinary ecosystem and gather stakeholders around collaborative projects. It aims at fostering the creation of innovative R&D project based on industrial and clinical needs, securing funding and setting up expert committees to review the progress of companies. One could mention the SUMIL project with GE and Philips (standardization of contrast ultrasonography for oncology).

The third pillar is creating a coherent and exhaustive structure of excellence which will operate concrete programs, which has not been really done up to this point. In the field of oncology, for example, the Paris region is a worldwide leader in terms of science and clinical care. When looking at business development and new companies, however, Paris is behind the rest of the world. The goal of Medicen is, therefore, to contribute to restructuring the ecosystem to translate the expertise we have in innovation and within our hospitals into successful businesses. A priority is also to gather together the prestigious clinical and research institutions we have in France, such as the largest European hospital network (AP-HP) and the Institutes Curie, Pasteur and Gustave Roussy, to promote their value towards pharma companies, with our partner the Canceropole. Our common goal is to create a central point of contact for the oncology field of the Paris region so that investors do not have to negotiate with various institutions but with one group, which would act on behalf of them.

The challenge of acting as an executive for a cluster like Medicen, is that there are many different interest groups within big pharma companies, small biotechs, research institutions and universities. Our goal is to speak as one voice for Paris region on behalf of all of these stakeholders, to attract the world's best scientists and clinicians and of course ambitious investors. Medicen wants to play a very active part as we see it as our mission to act on behalf of the Paris region.

Another example is in the field of personalized medicine and artificial intelligence, where we have a hub program for precision medicine. It is a collaborative project with Cap Digital, a Paris-based cluster in the digital tech space, with numerous companies and academic departments. The aim of this project, led and launched by three companies (OncoDesign, Intersystem and Servier) is to develop and implement a 'virtual platform', where the whole industry would be present to develop new personalized diagnostics and therapeutics. This would be a great access platform for entrepreneurs in this field to connect to other players and get access to databases and dedicated tools. I am aspiring to manage this project not only to promote it but also to review progress and achievements. It is a new approach, which is not very common in France yet, but we at Medicen think that this is the right way to go.

Currently, there are around 70 competitiveness clusters in France. Wouldn't it make sense to merge some of them to hence create more of a critical mass that could better compete at the international level?

Generally, there is no doubt that 70 is a very high figure for a country the size of France. In the health field, we have 5 to 6 very strong competitive clusters in France and there is currently no need to merge them. The Paris region itself is quite big; we currently have over 400 members and we are planning to double this number within the next four years. Nevertheless, there are efforts to work closer together as we are mutualizing resources for the European and international level. As an example, we want to build a French health competitiveness presence in Brussels on behalf of all the members. We have agreed to feature an identical content page in our application which demonstrates our common position. With the Lyon (Lyonbiopole) and Marseille (EuroBioMed) clusters, we are doing the same in the field of diagnostics in which we want to be more ambitious at a national level gathering our strengths.

Right in the month of your appointment, the July 2018 Strategic Council of Health Industries (CSIS) seems to have set a new tone compared to the previous editions. Do you think this 2018 edition will be a game changer in terms of economic regulation, market access and clinical trials?

The CSIS is a signal of hope for our members. However, we have heard many of these announcements by authorities and governments in the past, so I hope that real change will come this time. There are indeed many challenges to overcome in relation to regulation and market access – despite having one of the world's best healthcare systems. Many companies are going abroad for clinical trials for instance, and that is not normal they have to do so, as all the ecosystem is available here. It's a heavy loss for our country and its highly skilled health professionals.

However, it is essential to find an equilibrium between ethical considerations and absolute efficiency. We do not aim to have the Chinese position, where we could often see working at all costs to be the market leader is the priority.

Medicen enjoys a great position in France and globally with the reputation of the Paris region. How do you differentiate yourself from other clusters in France and Europe?

Paris is without any doubt a leader in the medical field, more recently in new developments like AI but also in traditional fields like biology and life sciences. Also having a clear mandate by our stakeholders -our members, the Paris Region authority and the State- it can be said that all ingredients are there for Paris to become a global leader, now more than ever. Our biggest challenge is to simplify processes together with a government that is willing to change the status quo. Our common goal is to make it easier to transform health innovation into business in France, for the sake of patients first but also for the fair recognition of our amazing national assets.

As for competition, our main competitors do not sit in Munich, London or Switzerland but in the USA and in China. There is a small competition within Europe, but in 30 years' time, the big clusters in health care will be the USA, China and Europe, not just Paris. We, therefore, need a strong European collaboration to be a robust competitor on the global scale. We have already an agreement with a few high-level European clusters to build a European network of very competitive national clusters, in order to strengthen our common global position.

A few words to conclude?

I am very positive about France's future as we currently have great circumstances to grow further. The health of tomorrow will be multi-disciplinary, combining biology, clinical data, engineering and mathematics. We have great assets in France in all these fields, and wider in Europe, so with the right concept, we will see great outcomes.

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