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To further uplift [Greece’s] positioning [as a clinical trials hub], administrative procedures should be decomplexified to create a more promising environment for collaboration among stakeholders

03.05.2023

Tags:

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Yvoni Papastelatou outlines Sanofi’s commitment to Greece, where the multinational firm has a strong and diverse team, a burgeoning clinical trial footprint, and is rolling out the global “play to win” strategy, with a common ambition to leverage science and innovation. She also touches on the access challenges in the Greek market, shares her view on how incoming EU funding can bolster the country’s healthcare system and describes the corporate social strategy for the coming years.

Can you begin by introducing yourself and your career trajectory up to this point?

My core motivation and, simultaneously, the thread of my career has always been to guide my actions by focusing on people and the core values of the organization. I have been in the business world for approximately two decades, the last four years in Sanofi, where I had the opportunity to further develop myself across different business and commercial roles, at local and regional level (Central and South EU). This represented four full years of learning and interacting with new cultures, ways of working and healthcare systems. And what is still inspiring in Sanofi is that we all share the same passion for chasing the miracles of science to improve people’s lives. Our

ambition is to transform the practice of medicine, turning the impossible into possible for millions of people around the world. We never settle!

Globally, Sanofi has restructured into Specialty Care, Vaccines and General Medicines business units in recent years, launched a new corporate identity, focused in on its most successful/potentially successful products and shed underperforming products and businesses as part of the “play-to-win” strategy. How has this transformation played out in Greece?

There is a universal truth that change always starts from within. Reflecting on Sanofi’s history, we can see that it has been a combination of diverse companies, with different cultures, identities, and brands. In 2022, as part of our transformation journey, we put together our heritage with different dimensions to create a single identity and a common purpose for the first time. Within this scope, we had to reinvent our mindset and find new ways to accelerate our efficiency and innovation always having in mind the benefit for the patient. This is what “Play-to-Win” strategy is all about, our six-year Global strategy, focusing on four key priorities. The first is to focus on growth, prioritising our portfolio to strengthen our corporate profile. The second is to lead with innovation, bringing transformative therapies to patients and refocusing our R&D pipeline on first- or best-in-class products. The third one, that goes beyond our products, is to accelerate efficiency by allocating resources to priority areas where Sanofi can make a difference. And finally, we push to reinvent the way we work and encourage our people to grow, to learn, and to collectively push our limits.

Our local strategy & structure are fully aligned with the company’s global mission and vision across the four business units – General Medicine, Specialty Care, Vaccines, and Consumer Healthcare which is standalone. For our vaccines portfolio we work with a partner in Greece.

In Specialty Care we have a long history of developing highly specialized treatments. We are really focusing on innovation and have products for Rare Diseases, Rare Blood Disorders, Neurology, Immunology, and Oncology. Our global and Greek ambition is to leverage science and innovation.

In General medicines, Sanofi has been at the forefront of the diabetes and cardiovascular management for nearly a century. Our ambition is to reverse the course of chronic diseases. To meet these challenges, we are combining our vast experience and portfolio of trusted brands with the power of technology and digital innovation to develop simplified, tailored care solutions that will transform the management of chronic diseases.

The Vaccines Global Business Unit partners with the public health authorities, medical and scientific communities to improve access to life-protecting vaccines and increase vaccination coverage, while striving to develop new and improved vaccines to enhance health and well-being.

Finally, regarding Consumer Healthcare, we are committed to provide self-care solutions to allow people to better manage their personal well-being, by leveraging the best in science, together with our world-class pharmaceutical quality standards and therefore deliver consumer-driven, innovative solutions that include medicines and other products for allergy, pain, digestive wellness, cough, cold and flu and physical and mental wellness.

What is your take on the product launch process in Greece, given that this is such a core part of Sanofi’s strategy?

Primarily it is important to acknowledge that the country has made significant progress in many areas including the reimbursement process. Looking forward, allowing patient access to innovation in a timely manner is critical. Most of our products reach reimbursement with significant delays, ranging from many months if not years, as compared to other European countries. We cannot be satisfied when patients in Greece are able to access products much later than their European counterparts.

We also need to include more value-based criteria in the negotiation process to support innovation. The scientific level in Greece is significantly high, so there is a positive environment from that perspective. Increased levels of discounts and challenges in innovation funding have an impact on the flow of medicines in Greece and therefore on patients' health. Working towards a more sustainable and predictable pharmaceutical care in Greece is critical and I am very happy that all parties agree on the right for all citizens to have access to pharmaceutical innovation, while ensuring the financial sustainability of the healthcare system. So, I remain optimistic, despite the challenges, as we all have a common purpose, and that is to significantly improve patients' healthcare.

What is Sanofi's positioning and approach to clinical trials in Greece?

Clinical trials are part of the Innovation Pillar in our "Play-to-Win" strategy. In 2021 Sanofi invested EUR 5.7 billion in R&D, 15 percent of total sales, with 70 percent of our marketed products being the result of in-house research and 80 percent of the portfolio being first- or best-in-class molecules.

Sanofi currently has around 26 certified clinical studies across the country. We are collaborating with more than 100 research centres with the participation of more than 250 patients. Sanofi invests more than three million euros every year on clinical trials in Greece, which means that these trials represent no financial burden for the state or for patients.

As an innovative industry we have made very clear proposals to the State on how the country can be developed in the field of research and development, provide incentives to attract more clinical trials, creating the opportunity for Greece to become a clinical trials Hub for the region, leveraging its great wealth in highly qualified clinical centres, internationally recognized health care professionals and experienced scientific staff.

Do you see Greece as having the potential to be both an essential medicine manufacturing hub and a clinical trials hub? In what direction see its positioning evolving within Europe in the coming years?

Greece has the potential to evolve its positioning within Europe in both aspects. Local manufacturers have a strong footprint, which is good for the country, and there is an opportunity to further build on its innovation capacity. On top, given the high level of the country's scientific background, Greece has the potential to become a clinical trials Hub for the region.

To further uplift the country's positioning, administrative procedures should be decomplexified to create a more promising environment for collaboration among stakeholders. Moreover, the development of a data-oriented & digital-oriented culture can also support on this direction. There are significant opportunities in Greece to leverage RWE and boost digitalization. In this field, we see a significant intention on the part of the authorities to push this forward and potentially even to "leap-frog" other countries.

Part of the EU recovery funding coming into Greece has been earmarked for digitalisation projects. How do you think that this money could best be used?

Greece's recovery and resilience plan is a combination of reforms and investments which will address specific challenges of Greece and will drive the country to the future, being more sustainable and resilient and will foster its economic growth (with an expected GDP growth of between two and 2.3 percent by 2026). One of the pillars of the plan is the digital transition of the country supported by 23 percent of the total agreed investment. The plan intends to modernize and digitalize public administration by improving the tax administration and justice systems, promoting the innovation capacity, digital uptake and resilience of key economic sectors, and upgrading healthcare and education. With regards to healthcare, the transformation should focus on the development of digital infrastructure of the hospitals and the primary care centres and their electronic interface. Furthermore, the expansion of e-prescription in the hospitals is necessary in order to monitor their consumption but also the finalization of the personal medical records and their integration into the e-prescription system to ensure full prescription monitoring at the patient level. Moreover, the integration of the therapeutic protocols that are already in place and the future ones, in the e-prescription system along with the diagnostic test results will contribute to the rationalization of the sector. Finally, we need to work intensively on leveraging big data and real-world evidence, develop registries and enhance digital tools and applications that promote health and reinforce outcome-based decisions.

How do you assess the level and the competencies of your Greek teams today?

Everything we achieve is linked to our teams and our people and we couldn't be prouder of our team which consists of approximately 200 highly educated and talented employees. Their passion for chasing the miracles of science is an immense source of inspiration & motivation.

During the last few years, new competencies were cultivated helping us to stay out of our "comfort zone" building on our self-development. Today, being brave, curious, resilient, and passionate to explore "what is more" are key competencies. Working differently to address key areas of development (e.g. RWE, new product launches, new scientific activities) is the only way to move forward. We are committed to continuing in that vein.

Is your team globally exposed?

Sanofi has a solid people development policy whereby our people are exposed to a diverse range of experiences, globally, regionally, and locally. This creates a lot of value for people. Also, Greece is part of Central and South European countries which fosters opportunities primarily to work across borders, but also for people from other affiliates to participate in projects owned by Greece.

For a 200-person affiliate here in Greece, over ten nationalities are represented. This highlights one more of our core priorities, which is to provide a workplace of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Building such an environment also directly influences and impacts how we engage with patients and customers, as well as with the communities where we work.

What are your priorities for the coming years?

Sanofi is dedicated to supporting people through their health challenges. We want to stand by all, from the few who suffer from rare diseases and the millions with long-term chronic conditions. Therefore, safeguarding access in a value-based & timely manner is a key priority. It is the duty of all stakeholders to collaborate towards unhindered healthcare and pharmaceutical access to patients without inequities and exclusions. This collaboration will contribute to Greece advancing towards a new challenging era, responding to societal expectations.

Regarding social impact, our strategy is embedded at all levels of our organization, aiming to build a healthier, more resilient world, by focusing on broader unmet needs, minimizing our impact on the environment, and building an inclusive work environment for employees.

Within this scope, Sanofi Greece has been building on its social impact, both internally and externally.

Internally, we are all committed to creating a flexible, diverse and inclusive working environment, where people feel comfortable speaking up and making the most of themselves, while respecting the highest standards of ethics and integrity, as well as conducting business in a responsible and sustainable way.

Externally, we are aiming to have a positive social impact that goes beyond health and strengthens our engagement with local communities. To this end, we build and drive CSR culture, by engaging employees to participate actively in corporate volunteering activities. Last year we implemented two employee volunteer projects, focused on wellbeing and hygiene literature. Our plan is to expand and reinforce our social footprint, by continuing to support local communities via employee volunteering activities and philanthropic contributions.

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