Michel Collard – CEO, PharmaScan BeLux



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PharmaScan BeLux is a non-profit organization established by pharma.be and Medaxes with the objective to collect and share reliable data on medicines delivered by pharmaceutical companies and distributors to healthcare institutions such as hospitals. CEO Michel Collard explains the rationale behind PharmaScan's formation, uptake levels in its first year of existence, his hopes for the organisation's future evolution, and the crucial role of data in solving the most pressing healthcare challenges.



What is PharmaScan and what was the rationale behind its formation?

PharmaScan is a non-profit entity created in June 2022 by two Belgian pharmaceutical industry associations, pharma.be and Medaxes. PharmaScan aims to create a comprehensive database on hospital drugs by aggregating shipping units from distributors. We collect and share data on drugs distributed to Belgian healthcare institutions (hospitals, pharmacies). The participants are distributors operating in Belgium and willing to collaborate with PharmaScan. We pool their data, clean it, perform quality checks, enrich it, aggregate it for hospital anonymization and then give access back to the participants. We provide access to data aggregated nationally or regionally.

It is important to mention that we are extremely attentive to cybersecurity. We are also pursuing an ISO27001 (cybersecurity) certification process. Anonymization of delivery locations is also essential. That is why we only provide data aggregated by a sufficient group of hospitals.

Did this initiative come about to solve a specifically Belgian problem or are there equivalents in other countries?

The project was launched to provide high quality data in terms of coverage and accuracy for the Belgian hospital drug market.

We were inspired by similar, well-established initiatives in the Netherlands, France and the Nordic countries. There, data sharing models have existed for decades and are a reliable source of information, even beyond the industry itself. We have largely taken on board the lessons learned from these successful experiences, as they are non-profit structures, initiated or mainly supported by the industry, whose objective is to improve the quality of existing data for drug distribution.

In Belgium, PharmaScan focuses specifically on the hospital market, while its international counterparts also cover the retail market. All these countries have recognized that accurate knowledge of drug distribution is essential to prepare and organize distribution activities properly. High-quality data can also contribute positively to decision-making throughout the healthcare ecosystem.

How does PharmaScan’s data differ from that provided by the commercial companies active in this space?

PharmaScan is positioned as an alternative, industry-driven data source. Our starting point was the lack of comprehensive and available data from both commercial and institutional sources. In some

countries, data is more readily available and more transparent. Sometimes the authorities themselves provide the data directly and make it public. It is obvious that anonymization must be guaranteed and controlled when requested. In Belgium, the differentiation of PharmaScan probably comes from the improved accuracy, as well as the improved accessibility and ease of understanding.

What has industry uptake and response to PharmaScan been like in its first year of existence?

It has been great so far! There are about 31 companies currently participating, which we estimate represents 85 percent of the market value of drugs distributed to hospitals. We only started collecting and publishing data in January of this year, so this high level of coverage represents a strong start. In the coming weeks and months, we expect more companies to join us. We are confident that by 2024, our market coverage could exceed 90 percent. As a comparison, initiatives in other countries are not far from covering the entire market, which is ultimately our goal.

PharmaScan is a collaborative, not-for-profit initiative. We welcome suggestions from participants for improvement and development. We recently gathered our HIP (Hospital Insights Platform) users and officially measured a very high level of confidence and satisfaction.

This initiative was set up between the innovator and generic associations; how to these companies' needs differ and how is PharmaScan's offering tailored to these differences?

Companies can indeed use data in different ways, but in general, it is to make more informed decisions about their wider distribution activities. This ranges from identifying development opportunities to issues such as drug delivery, supply chain and inventory management. In between, there are access issues, reimbursement files, and everything else related to commercialisation. With our data, companies can also measure their competitive impact, resulting in greater efficiency that ultimately benefits the dynamics of the entire drug distribution landscape. Better and more accurate data leads to better decisions at all levels. Overall, PharmaScan provides a range of data and services that all pharmaceutical companies – whether they focus on innovator drugs, generics or biosimilars – can use.

PharmScan aims to eventually provide data to stakeholders beyond just the pharma industry. How do you see this project evolving in terms of participants?

There are three stages in the development and vision we have established. The first step is to establish our reputation by offering not only high-quality data, but also strong cybersecurity and anonymization controls. The confidence in our platform depends on the number of participants; we are extremely happy with the current 31 participants, but the more participants we have, the more complete our data sets will be. The first short-term goal is to establish a solid foundation with existing participants and a high user satisfaction rate.

The second step is to determine how we might, while maintaining our quality standards, further enrich our drug distribution data with other sources and be able to provide an additional layer of information. There are many possibilities and, ultimately, other stakeholders could benefit as well.

This is what we envision as a third step, to be able, as a non-profit organization, to contribute to information-based decision making throughout the healthcare ecosystem. If the information generated by our HIP database can benefit other stakeholders, PharmaScan is more than willing to consider it. The format and granularity in which this data can be made available to a broader stakeholder base is yet to be defined, but at least in terms of intent, it’s very much within our philosophy.

Are you referring to other data sources within Belgium or international ones?

The obvious first step is Belgium, because there are many other data sources, which may or may not be publicly available. This is also something we want to explore. Of course, the way we do this must be surrounded by the appropriate processes and controls, preserving the integrity of the data, and ensuring anonymization at all required levels. But again, at this stage, before we enrich the data or explore its full potential, we are primarily focused on what we are doing now and on establishing PharmaScan as a strong and reliable partner in collecting and providing data on the drug distribution.

Given your long experience in the Belgian market with Lilly, Celgene, and your involvement at different levels, what do you see as the key trends at play today?

A fundamental trend in Belgium has been the continuous dialogue and collaboration between public and private stakeholders. Belgium is a country where interactions and sometimes difficult discussions have always been valued by all stakeholders. Let’s not forget that this is an extremely important market in terms of the pharmaceutical industry’s footprint. This has been preserved through intense dialogue. Also, as a veteran of the industry, now an observer, I think that maintaining patient access to a wide range of existing and future medicines deserves very open communication channels.

The second element, of course, is data. A Health Data Agency was recently created in Belgium and there is a clear ambition at all levels to facilitate the secondary use of health data. This is a major trend and I hope it will serve as a strong guide to structure, frame and foster access to more data sources in the years to come. I believe that public, but also private initiatives supported by industry, such as PharmaScan, have a role to play. If data for healthcare research and innovation can be made available in a secure and controlled manner, there will be an opportunity for more public-private partnerships.

Please share a few concluding words on PharmaScan for our international audience.

In creating PharmaScan, we were inspired by the international experience of Denmark, the Netherlands and France, for example. We are proud to have copied and pasted some of the best practices and success stories from these initiatives, building up a strong Belgian expertise. In the coming years, we hope to reach the level of these countries in terms of coverage and data reliability. In France, for example, industry data is now considered the benchmark by industry and public stakeholders. In the future, our ambition is to reach this level of trust.

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