Michele Genini – CEO & General Manager, iQone Healthcare Switzerland



Our goal is to build a company that continues to grow and innovate, one that thrives beyond our leadership and remains a lasting player in the market

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iQone Healthcare has achieved impressive growth under the leadership of CEO Michele Genini, who has guided the company from launching a single biosimilar product in 2016 to building a diverse portfolio of seven. Now part of Celltrion and with a strategic focus on the Swiss market, iQone has become a key player in the biosimilar sector.

How has iQone evolved over the past three years and what are the most significant recent developments?

Since 2021, iQone has experienced substantial and consistent growth. Our primary focus remains on biosimilars, particularly through our longstanding partnership with Celltrion Healthcare, a South Korean company we have collaborated with since 2015. While we began with a single biosimilar product launched in 2016, we have since expanded to offer seven biosimilars in the market. Additionally, we have ventured into transplantation medicine with an original product that is currently undergoing the pricing process. Today, we are proud to hold the position of the third-largest player in the biosimilar market, trailing only a few key competitors. This journey has seen us grow, structure, and establish ourselves firmly within the industry.

These results led to iQone’s acquisition by Celltrion in Q4 2024. The acquisition represents a significant milestone in Celltrion’s European expansion strategy and iQone will become a wholly

owned subsidiary of Celltrion.

How has iQone’s strategic focus evolved, and where is the company positioned in today’s market landscape?

Today, iQone’s focus is entirely on the Swiss market, reflecting a shift that became definitive in early 2022. Previously, up until late 2021, we maintained a dual-market strategy, with operations spanning both Switzerland with biosimilar products and parts of Europe with originator products. The European part of the company was sold to Clinigen in 2018 and iQone’s management continued to operate and develop the company, which was later renamed Clinigen Europe. However, from October 2021 onward, we chose to concentrate exclusively on iQone and the Swiss market. This decision was driven by the growth and potential of Celltrion’s product portfolio, which required full commitment. Also, we chose to not compete in the European biosimilar market, which is highly competitive and dominated by major players, including our own partner, Celltrion Healthcare. Celltrion, along with other large companies, has firmly established itself across key European markets, making it strategically unwise for us to attempt to compete. Thus, by dedicating 100% of our efforts to the Swiss market and focusing mostly on biosimilars, we have positioned ourselves to maximize our impact and strengthen our market presence in a space where we can add the value without facing unnecessary barriers.

With your current portfolio of seven biosimilar products spanning oncology, rheumatology, and gastroenterology, what drives your growth strategy, and do you foresee expanding into new therapeutic areas?

Our portfolio strategy is inherently driven by market dynamics, specifically by the expiration of patents for originator biologics, which creates opportunities for biosimilars. Presently, we see substantial potential in the inflammation segment, an area that has attracted significant industry attention, as expected We will continue to grow our portfolio in this field and hold one of the largest if not the largest portfolio in this segment. In contrast, oncology is experiencing a relatively quieter phase but holds tremendous future potential. Key developments include the anticipated patent expirations for immunotherapies such as pembrolizumab and nivolumab at the end of the decade. These are major products, with the Swiss market alone for nivolumab and pembrolizumab valued at approximately 250 million Swiss francs, representing a considerable opportunity. Another area of emerging focus is ophthalmology, with products likeaflibercept and ranibizumab expected to

enter the biosimilar space in the coming years. Ultimately, our approach aligns with broader industry trends; decisions are shaped more by market-driven opportunities tied to patent expirations than by isolated internal strategy.

Beyond your collaboration with Celltrion, do you have other strategic partnerships supporting your biosimilar portfolio?

While we have been recently acquired by Celltrion, we continue to have other collaborations. For example, in oncology, we are partnered with USV Private Limited, an Indian company, for one of our products. Additionally, we are exploring other partnerships with for separate products that would complement our portfolio of Celltrion products. The biosimilar industry differs significantly from generics; development and production tend to be concentrated among a few dominant players like Celltrion and Samsung Biologics. Beyond these major producers, the market is more fragmented, with various smaller players developing individual products. We are also observing a surge in biosimilar development from China, though the timeline and specifics of their market entry remain uncertain.

What are the key dynamics shaping Switzerland’s biosimilar market, and how have recent regulatory changes and market trends influenced its evolution?

The Swiss biosimilar market has undergone a significant transformation since we introduced our first product in 2016, a period marked by extremely slow uptake. Initially, originator biologics retained a dominant market share of 70-80%. However, the landscape began shifting substantially over the past year, driven in large part by new regulatory measures. One such reform includes automatic substitution of subcutaneous biosimilars at pharmacies, as well as high patient co-pays for originators that fail to meet specific price thresholds. While this high co-pay primarily serves as a psychological deterrent—since most originator manufacturers reduce their prices to comply—it has nonetheless influenced market behavior.

Another crucial development was the unification of margin structures between biosimilars and originators, which eliminated disparities that historically favored originator pricing. This alignment has underscored the government’s commitment to promoting biosimilar adoption.

In hospitals, we have observed a significant shift from originators to biosimilars, especially within the last year. Traditionally, Swiss hospitals maintained both originators and biosimilars, with a

preference for originators. However, this trend has started to reverse, driven by strong hospital purchasing groups and mounting economic pressures that compel cost-cutting measures. Switzerland’s traditionally cautious approach to adopting new medical therapies also plays a role in this shift. While some skepticism about biosimilar efficacy compared to originators was prevalent in the early years, growing evidence and proven efficacy have gradually changed perceptions.

The expansion of biosimilars in the market, coupled with rising healthcare costs, has further accelerated this transition. Hospitals, once highly profitable entities, are now facing financial constraints, leading, in some cases, to restructurings and layoffs. This economic pressure naturally drives the adoption of more cost-effective therapies, including biosimilars. Overall, while regulatory changes have been instrumental, the broader transformation reflects a confluence of factors, including market maturation, economic considerations, and evolving healthcare provider and patient perspectives. This mirrors the gradual acceptance trajectory we saw with generics years ago, as public trust and familiarity with biosimilars continue to grow.

With increasing competition and evolving market dynamics, where do you see the main opportunities for growth in the biosimilar space, and how is iQone positioning itself to capitalize on these changes?

The biosimilar market is full of opportunities, but success hinges on a few critical elements. First and foremost, having a comprehensive product portfolio is essential. This isn’t unique to iQone; it’s a fundamental principle for any serious player in this industry. A broad portfolio signals credibility and stability in the marketplace. To maintain and expand such a portfolio, it’s vital to work with strong, focused and reliable partners. Our strategy is to collaborate closely with one or two key partners who provide consistent, quality products and invest in internal development to build a leading portfolio of biosimilar products. This approach has proven more manageable and effective than scattering efforts across numerous opportunistic smaller partnerships. This focus is particularly important for specialized companies like ours, as it allows us to achieve economies of scale—streamlining resources and operations across multiple products within the same therapeutic area, such as oncology. Given that margins in the biosimilar and generic space are lower than those of originator pharmaceuticals, achieving these efficiencies is crucial.

Market timing is another critical factor. The biosimilar market is becoming increasingly competitive, making it essential to be among the first movers. Being an early entrant allows companies to capture the largest market share. Typically, the first few players dominate the market, with later

entrants finding it increasingly challenging to compete. As such, speed to market is a decisive competitive advantage. Equally important is the strength of relationships with healthcare professionals (HCPs). Biosimilars require strong engagement with physicians, hospital pharmacies, and buying groups and therefore, building trust and maintaining a credible, knowledgeable medical and sales team is crucial for market success. We have firsthand experience of this; for example, despite being the last to launch the biosimilar Adalimumab, we quickly outpaced several competitors due to our established relationships in rheumatology and gastroenterology. This illustrates that trust and familiarity with the market are key differentiators.

Lastly, the level of service offered to the market is a vital component. Providing meaningful support to healthcare professionals, whether through collaborative projects, fast response to their requests or tailored assistance is a key focus for iQone.. This commitment to service has helped us secure strong partnerships and outperform companies that may have entered the market earlier. The quality of our relationships and our comprehensive market engagement create a strong foundation for success.

In summary, iQone’s strategy focuses on building a robust portfolio, achieving early market entry, cultivating deep relationships with key market stakeholders, and providing superior service. These pillars enable us to navigate the complex and competitive biosimilar landscape effectively. Our integrated access to the Celltrion rapidly expanding portfolio will further enhance our ability to service the Swiss healthcare ecosystem.

As a relatively young player in a competitive market, how would you describe iQone’s current perception among healthcare professionals? Are you satisfied with your brand’s recognition, or do you see room for further growth?

There is always room for growth, especially as a newer player in a mature market. However, our position has evolved significantly over the past two to three years. This progress can be attributed primarily to two key factors. First, our expanding product portfolio has greatly enhanced our market presence. The more products we launch, the more visible and credible we become, automatically building brand equity. A broad portfolio signals stability and dedication, which resonates with our market partners and stakeholders.

The second factor is our proactive investment in brand building. This goes beyond financial investments; it encompasses time, effort, and strategic use of communication channels, including digital platforms and multi-channel approaches. While it’s challenging to measure the precise

return on these branding efforts, we've observed a marked increase in recognition and awareness of our company. The combination of a strong physical market presence with targeted brand communication has proven effective.

Despite these gains, we acknowledge the inherent advantage of established pharmaceutical companies that have been present for decades. It would be unrealistic to expect parity overnight. However, our smaller size offers a strategic advantage—agility. We are able to respond to customer needs quickly, often making decisions within hours, unlike larger competitors that require multiple layers of approval. This ability to act swiftly has been consistently appreciated by our clients and partners. Our adaptability and responsiveness distinguish us in the market, allowing us to effectively navigate challenges and seize opportunities.

In such a competitive market, attracting and retaining top talent is essential. What is iQone's approach to building and differentiating its workforce, and what makes your value proposition stand out?

Talent acquisition is a core focus for us, and we strive to differentiate ourselves by fostering a unique work culture. Our approach centers on attracting individuals who possess an entrepreneurial mindset and desire greater flexibility and impact than they might find at larger pharmaceutical companies. Our team comprises two primary demographics. First, we have seasoned professionals who have spent many years in large corporations but seek a change from the bureaucratic and rigid structures often found there. These highly skilled and experienced individuals find iQone appealing because we offer them a chance to leverage their expertise in a more dynamic, agile environment. It's a mutually beneficial arrangement—our organization gains from their extensive knowledge, and they enjoy renewed professional fulfillment and meaningful impact. We also attract younger professionals who are in the early stages of their careers. For them, iQone offers a rare opportunity to gain diverse experiences and take on multiple responsibilities within a flexible and fast-paced environment. Unlike larger companies with rigid hierarchies, we provide the chance to be involved in various functions, accelerating their learning and development.

Competitive compensation and benefits are, of course, essential. We understand that offering less than market standards is not an option. Equally important is our flexibility in work arrangements. Although I firmly believe in the value of in-person collaboration and fostering a sense of belonging, we strike a balance by offering a flexible working environment that supports both individual needs

and team cohesion. Our work culture is another significant draw. We offer a flat organizational structure that values quick decision-making, open communication, and a direct, collaborative approach. This agility is a defining characteristic that many of our employees find highly rewarding. It allows us to respond quickly to market changes and customer needs, fostering a workplace where everyone's contributions are recognized and valued. This unique combination of flexibility, impactful work, and a supportive culture has been instrumental in attracting and retaining exceptional talent within our team.

Looking ahead, what are the key milestones and goals you hope to achieve at iQone over the next two to three years, and how do you envision the company's long-term future?

Our focus remains on continued growth and strengthening our position in the biosimilar market. However, our long-term vision goes beyond just expansion. We are committed to building a sustainable company that will thrive even after our current leadership has moved on. My goal is to ensure that iQone continues to innovate, launch new biosimilar and original products, and maintain or improve its market standing for many years to come. This is about laying the foundation for a company that will stand the test of time, with leadership transitions being part of that journey.

Internally, we are already making strides to prepare for this transition. Together with Laurent Massuyeau, our Founder and President, we frequently discuss how we can grow iQone beyond our leadership, carefully planning for the next generation of leaders who will take the company forward. Time moves quickly—iQone has already been in operation for 12 years—and it's important for us to think about the company's future in a way that extends beyond our tenure.

Ultimately, we don't want our time here to mark the end of the company's growth. We want to build something that continues to flourish, even after we have transitioned out. A company that maintains its strength and success is our vision for the future. The integration of iQone into Celltrion is a fundamental step in this direction. By combining Celltrion's portfolio expertise with our established commercial operation, the acquisition will drive growth and enhance access to essential biosimilar and innovative medicines in Switzerland.

That kind of legacy—where a business continues to prosper long after the founder's involvement—is the professional achievement we aspire to.

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