Expanding Oncology Access in Some of Europe’s Most Complex Markets



"Every decision, every model, every partnership is built around one goal: getting medicines to patients faster"

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Cancer is one of Europe’s most urgent health challenges. Responsible for 23 percent of all mortality on the continent, the burden is particularly acute outside the EU5, where access timelines vary dramatically. Countries in Central and Eastern Europe, for example, face some of Europe’s highest cancer mortality rates, largely due to later diagnosis and lower levels of access to innovative treatments.

Expanding access to innovative cancer treatments in the hugely diverse and sometimes overlooked smaller European markets requires differentiated approaches. BeOne Medicines – established in Europe since 2018 and with a growing hematology and oncology portfolio established across the continent already – exemplifies how innovative and tailored access models can enable scalable access in highly heterogeneous healthcare systems.

BeOne’s Sub-Region Europe grouping – an eclectic mix of the 22 European markets outside the EU5 – encompasses both highly resourced and more resource-constrained European markets. Access timelines vary wildly too, as Sub-Region Europe General Manager, Stefan Barbour explains. “While the Nordics, Switzerland, and Poland tend to move faster, others, such as Romania and Hungary, face longer and more complex reimbursement processes.”

Fast, Flexible, Fit for Purpose

Product launches in these disparate environments require a model that is, in Barbour's words, "fast, flexible, and fit for purpose." For example, in terms of regulation, launching in Switzerland – where the regulatory authority Swissmedic is not part of the European Medicines Agency (EMA) – has necessitated the creation of an entirely separate strategy.

It has also meant disrupting industry norms by going early into frontier markets. Reflecting on the past few years since launching in the region in 2021, Barbour notes that "one of the earliest and most defining decisions was to move away from the conventional "EU5-first" approach. Instead of sequential launches, we embraced simultaneous launches across markets; a bold move that reflects our belief in equity of access and operational agility."

There is also a recognition that, for such an unusual and eclectic mix of countries, a one-size-fits-all approach simply would not work. This is reflected in different go-to-market models: today, Barbour's region boasts direct affiliates in Switzerland, the Nordics, Poland, and the Netherlands, while in 13 other countries it operates through distributors, reflecting differences in volume, regulatory complexity, and strategic priorities.

Tailored Pricing

A tailored approach can also be seen in BeOne's pricing strategies, with Barbour and his team constantly attempting to balance rapid access with financial realities within specific national contexts. "Every launch sequence and every pricing decision considers the economic stress on patients and healthcare systems as well as the value of our therapies," he states.

"When determining the price of our medicines in a particular country, we consider the health system's financing and the value that our therapies bring to a broad range of people; from patients to healthcare professionals, payers, and society."

Barbour adds, "We've overcome most of the hurdles we have faced so far through close collaboration with health authorities, transparent communication, and the development of locally tailored reimbursement dossiers that reflect each market's specific context."

Early Access Programs & Clinical Trials

Aside from traditional launch strategies, BeOne has also been able to foster access in Sub-Region Europe through early access and compassionate use programmes as well as clinical trials, pathways that serve medical necessity, not commercial entry.

“From the outset, we’ve been determined to close the gap between regulatory approval and real patient access,” outlines Barbour. “In several countries, including Switzerland, early access and compassionate use programs have allowed eligible patients to receive treatment in accordance with regulatory provisions while reimbursement processes were still ongoing.”

He continues, “Our clinical trial strategy followed the same philosophy: focus where the need is greatest. We launched studies in countries like Poland, where strong investigator networks and high patient need allowed us to generate meaningful data while supporting local healthcare systems.”

This creates a win-win situation: providing early access to medicines for trial participants while also creating valuable data that demonstrates the value of BeOne’s therapies in reimbursement negotiations, ultimately fostering even greater access for patients with cancer across the region.

Aggressive Talent Development & Cultural Agility

What kind of skills, personalities, and experiences are needed to execute on such a dynamic and fast-paced model? Barbour outlines that “From the beginning, we focused on hiring for mindset rather than just experience. We looked for people who brought restless curiosity, courage, and cultural agility; qualities that would allow them to thrive in an environment defined by speed and change.”

Embracing a fully flexible and remote model has allowed BeOne Sub-Region Europe to attract some of Europe’s best and brightest talent, as well as build up its brand recognition as a top employer. Having brought a 72-strong team on board, Barbour’s bywords today are “trust” and “empowerment:” BeOne’s teams are frequently given ‘stretch assignments,’ providing the opportunity to learn and grow beyond their core area of expertise, and Barbour speaks passionately about providing his team with the freedom to shape the company’s global vision within their own countries.

The diversity of the markets in Sub-Region Europe is also reflected in the teams, with Barbour proclaiming that “diversity is our superpower.” He explains, “With 22 markets, countless

languages, and a wide range of working styles, our strength lies in our ability to bring all these differences together toward one shared goal," noting the challenges and opportunities of bringing together three examples: Dutch directness, Poles' desire for structure, and the consensus-based decision making seen in the Nordics. "For us, cultural agility means more than just awareness," reflects Barbour, "it's about respect, adaptability, and a genuine openness to learning from one another."

Looking Forward

With BeOne now a more established name in European healthcare and the life sciences, and with a unique strategy already bearing fruit for patients in Sub-Region Europe, what might we expect to see next?

For Barbour, Sub-region Europe will maintain the momentum it has established, continuing to unlock rapid access routes to BeOne's medicines for patients who need them now. "Ultimately, everything we do is driven by purpose," he concludes. "Every decision, every model, every partnership is built around one goal: getting medicines to patients faster."

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