Interview: Deirdre Bourke – Country Lead, Eli Lilly Ireland



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Deirdre Bourke, Country Lead at Eli Lilly's Irish affiliate, highlights the strategic importance of Ireland to Lilly's global operations, their exciting upcoming pipeline, the challenges and opportunities she foresees for Lilly in Ireland, and her own professional transition from managing Lilly's diabetes portfolio to Lilly's overall commercial activities in Ireland.

Can you provide an overview of Eli Lilly's commercial operations in Ireland?

Globally, Lilly promote and bring products to market in the three areas of diabetes, biomedicines and oncology. As Country Lead, I manage Lilly's sales and marketing arm in Ireland.

We have successfully launched two products in Ireland this year, one in psoriasis and another in diabetes.

Both represent very positive steps for Lilly in Ireland, adding to our existing product portfolio. We also promote a number of projects in diabetes through our global alliance with Boehringer Ingelheim (BI). This collaboration began in 2011 and has worked very well, we launch and promote products with them, specifically products for patients with Type-II diabetes.

Looking forward, I am very pleased to say that we have a very exciting pipeline and Lilly remains committed to bringing the best innovative products to the Irish market.

What is the strategic significance of the Irish affiliate to Eli Lilly's global operations?

Lilly has an extremely strong presence in Ireland. In addition to the commercial arm, we have a manufacturing facility in Kinsale, Cork, which was established in 1978 and represents Lilly's largest manufacturing site globally. In April 2016, it was announced that an additional EUR 35 million will be invested in that site to establish a new high-tech manufacturing facility in order to transform how medicines are made in the future, most notably through the use of continuous manufacturing technology. This will be instrumental in the development and commercialization of a number of products in our late-stage pipeline, and ultimately establish the Kinsale facility as a worldwide center of excellence for API continuous manufacturing.

This also means that it is critical for the innovative products manufactured in that plant to be available to the domestic Irish market. As an example, the two new products launched this year are manufactured at the Kinsale facility, which is testament to our commitment to the Irish market. Ireland's domestic market may be small but given our strong manufacturing presence here, it is only right that we demonstrate our full commitment to Ireland.

In 2010, Lilly also established our Global Business Solutions Center in Cork, which supports our European financial operations, further expanding our footprint in Ireland.

Since 1978, Lilly has invested over EUR 2 billion into Ireland, which speaks volumes about the strategic significance that Ireland possesses, not just from a commercial perspective but holistically, across all these activities.

What challenges do you see for Lilly in Ireland?

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Like the rest of Europe, Ireland has gone through a recession and is facing financial constraints in terms of healthcare expenditures. Healthcare spending, and in particular, the cost of medicines, has come under increased scrutiny in the past decade, which is understandable. The new Framework Agreement on the Supply of Medicines, negotiated between the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association (IPHA), the Health Service Executive (HSE) and the Department of Health, in July 2016, has brought in a new framework under which the government and pharmaceutical industry can work together to deliver cost-effective and innovative medicines to patients in Ireland. This is very encouraging and having that process in place for the next four years means that all relevant stakeholders can operate in a climate of stability and security.

At the same time, the Irish government has convened an all-party panel to set out a ten-year-plan for the Irish healthcare system. The government's aim is to provide cost-effective medicines to

patients in an affordable and sustainable manner, and it is important that the pharma industry works to support them.

On another note, the delivery of healthcare is also evolving rapidly, particularly in terms of the increasing dominant role that technology is assuming. The way we communicate with healthcare professionals will need to evolve to adapt to their changing needs and also to those of the patient, indirectly, as the end-user. For instance, we are increasing the value around our products by not only providing quality medicines but also support packages for patients, their families and healthcare professionals.

The challenge here is that we are still working in a strongly regulated industry, not a fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) environment. The way we conduct business, particularly in terms of compliance and ethical behavior, remains of paramount importance, and that will not change even as we incorporate new technologies into our operations.

Ultimately, pharma companies need to deliver quality products that are of value to healthcare professionals and patients. In terms of Lilly in Ireland, this is our continued commitment.

What does the Lilly brand represent in Ireland?

Lilly was founded in 1876 on the mission to deliver innovative, research-backed pharma products of the highest possible quality. 140 years later, that is still our mission and this is what we represent to healthcare professionals. Our quality and innovation speak for themselves.

As an employer, the Lilly brand is also very strong. We are known for the respect we have for our employees and people. We employ over 1,000 people in Ireland but our reach extends beyond that. That respect is certainly something that has struck a chord during my 12 years working for Lilly and I think it is an aspect of the company culture which means a lot to Lilly employees throughout the country.

You were also appointed to the board of the American Chamber of Commerce in September 2016. How does that complement your role at Lilly?

I was delighted and honored to be appointed to the board of the American Chamber of Commerce in Ireland. The American Chamber is widely recognized for the calibre and quality of their work. All the top American companies active in Ireland and Irish companies active in America are involved, allowing the Chamber to provide a nuanced viewpoint in their interactions with Government and other stakeholders across a range of different industries.

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It is still new to me but from what I have seen their scope is impressive, as is the broad diversity of the many individuals and companies involved in the Chamber.

I think as a pharma company, it is important that we look outwardly as well as inwardly. The pharma industry has a lot to learn from other industries and I hope my new role with the American Chamber of Commerce will facilitate that.

Prior to becoming Country Lead, you oversaw the Lilly diabetes portfolio in Ireland. How have you found moving from a more product-focused role to a more operations-based role?

Our diabetes alliance with BI is very important to Lilly. In Ireland, we were effectively building up the diabetes business unit here, so it was an exciting opportunity and I enjoyed looking after the diabetes portfolio.

That said, moving to a broader role has been a fantastic opportunity. Ireland is a smaller market so it is important that the various business units collaborate for the affiliate's overall success. The reality is that pricing, access and reimbursement remain important issues and a large part of my role is to manage them across our three business segments. The expansion of my job scope is certainly not without its challenges but I really enjoy the varied aspects of my new position, for instance, through working with IPHA.

Looking forward, what are the most fundamental things you want to accomplish in the next few years?

Fundamentally, I want to continue to build the strong Lilly brand in Ireland, to maintain our internal relationships between the commercial, manufacturing and shared services arms, as well as our external relationships with key stakeholders like the government, state bodies and healthcare professionals.

One of the key issues for the entire pharmaceutical sector is the promotion of the principles of certainty and stability. That is one of the key objectives that Lilly continues to press in our interactions with industry and Government. The fostering of these principles is extremely important as it allows for concrete forward planning. If we want to continue to innovate you need to know what type of business environment you will be operating in.

Another objective is the promotion of 'Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics' or STEM-focused education throughout Ireland. One of the key strengths of the pharmaceutical sector

in this country has been access to large numbers of well-educated staff possessing the skillsets required by the industry. For that to be maintained, there needs to be an ongoing flow of graduates with knowledge of STEM subjects – that is an issue we are constantly pressing in our interactions with Government. Fostering an educational environment that promotes STEM is vital for the Irish sector’s continued growth.

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