Harry Nardis – Managing Director, Astellas Greece & Cyprus



"Astellas is committed to being at the forefront of healthcare change to turn innovative science into value for patients."

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Astellas Greece & Cyprus MD, Harry Nardis, emphasizes the importance of integrity, compliance and innovation to the Astellas business model, key priorities, navigating the Greek pharmaceutical landscape while maintaining a high-quality reputation, and retaining the company's vision of being at the forefront of healthcare change.

Having assumed the leadership position for Astellas Hellas in the last year, what have been your key priorities?

Given the situation that Greece has been in over the last few years and the steps the Greek Government has had to take in relation to the pharmaceutical sector, there have been a lot of risks that the organization has had to take in order to be able to support all of our stakeholders.

While navigating these changes, Astellas Greece has had to ensure that the company and the patients that we supply medications to are not put at risk It's a very delicate and difficult balance to achieve. But it is also an immensely gratifying achievement, which reflects on our core values.

Regarding our core business, Astellas is a leader in Urology and Transplantation/Immunology and is establishing a leading position in oncology.

In Greece, we are proud of the fact that we have launched six products in the last ten years despite the recent economic crisis. Furthermore, we are very proud that, although in recent years pharmaceutical expenditure in Greece has fallen to levels similar to 2003, we have continually improved and grown our industry standing. To mark our achievement, we were recently awarded with the Committed to Excellence Two Star Award by the European Foundation of Quality Management (EFQM). We were given this due to the commitment demonstrated by the Greek affiliate to excellence and quality management, guaranteeing a healthy sustainable growth even in this challenging environment.

At the global level, there have been recent acquisitions for Astellas, such as Ocata Therapeutics in 2015, as well as Ganymed Pharmaceuticals in October 2016. Are these acquisitions part of an overarching expansion strategy?

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Astellas is committed to being at the forefront of healthcare change to turn innovative science into value for patients. We anticipate changes and improvate patients' lives through the development of medical solutions that address areas of unmet medical needs.

We remain dedicated to meeting patients' needs every day, and our support for them will never waiver. We recognize that patients, caregivers, providers and others in healthcare face great challenges, and the need for medical advancements remains urgent. It is crucial for us to understand and respond to this need with new approaches to bring added value to patients and customers.

As such, we focus on turning science into value for patients in areas of unmet medical need where we have expertise and where we believe innovation can help to address some of the most significant medical needs. We continue to enhance our capabilities to deliver innovative medical solutions in urology, oncology, immunology, nephrology and neuroscience as core therapeutic areas for research.

Additionally, we are advancing new therapeutic areas including muscle disease and ophthalmology with new technologies and modalities, such as next-generation vaccines and regenerative medicine. In addition, we seek to accelerate scientific discovery by building up our world-class capabilities with strategic partnerships that can result in groundbreaking solutions where there may otherwise be limited options. Through its open innovation approach, Astellas brings together the best teams from both inside and outside the company to undertake research activities and other initiatives in a collaborative environment and based on the most advanced science.

In the Greek market, how do you reconcile the need to continuously provide innovative products in your portfolio with the financial and bureaucratic hindrances in the healthcare system?

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Pharmaceutical innovation is widely understood to be a major stimulus to real economic growth and to improvements in society's standard of living. When I refer to innovation, I include both incremental and breakthrough innovation. Incremental innovations undertaken by drug companies can provide added value for both physicians and patients. For example, these innovations can provide physicians with the flexibility to treat the individual needs of diverse patients with precision while improving patient compliance by reducing adverse drug reactions and side effects. Breakthrough innovations are characterized by their scientific and commercial novelty, and higher financial risks. However, the potential benefit to patients and society have been well documented in various reports across the globe.

Astellas Greece has been able to launch new products in Greece by communicating the positive outcomes of our treatments to patients. The Greek government is trying to create a sustainable healthcare system, which is based on the benefit that medicines can bring to patients and society by bringing in structural reforms that could provide better access to new innovative treatments. It is felt that this could be achieved by introducing elements such as an HTA body, Managed Entry Agreements, the use of real world data, investing in prevention, evidenced based policy making, better prescription control and increased penetration of generics.

How do you reconcile the long-term vision of Astellas and the short-term approach of the Greek pharmaceutical reality?

Finding the intersection of these two differing perspectives is at the crux of my responsibilities. It has been very difficult to deliver short term objectives when the landscape is so rapidly changing, while retaining a grasp of the long-term vision. It has also been challenging to maintain credence and focus.

Balancing this instability with a long-term vision, is really challenging but my methodology has always been to anchor my leadership style on the Astellas values of being patient focused, taking ownership, results driven, communicating with openness and acting with integrity. Especially given unpredictable externalities, these values and behaviors motivate and create an atmosphere in which anything is possible, where today's innovations in science and technology become tomorrow's medical advancements

The Greek pharmaceutical budget is closed and restricted at 1.945 million EUR. How does this restriction affect your own forecasting?

This pharmaceutical budget is unfair for everybody – for the industry, the patients and the government. The Greek government has been adamant on using the metric of keeping the budget at one percent of the county's GDP. However, this is only an ideal metric when the country's GDP is at its peak and stable, and has the potential for growth. In the context of a financial crisis where the GDP is continually contracting, this metric can be misleading and can even have severe implications for all stakeholders.

Greece has faced one of the most profound fiscal crises that forced significant cuts in public spending through short term measures. Savings were generated by pharmaceutical pricing cuts and excessive clawbacks and rebates (25 percent of pharmaceuticals spend). Public spending on pharmaceuticals fell by EUR 3.2 billion, representing a 62 percent drop. Public spending on health fell by EUR 5.2 billion, representing a 32 percent drop in real terms.

The challenges that all these measures pose to the industry and consequently to Astellas Greece are tremendous. But we are committed that through structural reforms and by supporting innovation we can find the appropriate equilibrium.

How do you communicate the value of your products in this environment?

As we hold ourselves accountable to our community and to those with whom we work and partner, we believe our responsibility as a global corporate citizen extends beyond our medical innovations. That's why we communicate with a range of stakeholders to address social issues that affect people throughout the world. We also work to advance Access to Health with a focus on four areas where we can uniquely contribute to better global health: creating innovation, enhancing availability, strengthening the healthcare system and improving health literacy. We are passionate about corporate social responsibility initiatives that create sustainable, long-term benefit for patients and communities around the world.

At Astellas, we focus on making changing tomorrow a reality.

How is the Astellas brand perceived in Greece?

Astellas Pharma Greece is a subsidiary of Astellas Pharma Inc. based in Tokyo Japan. As a Japanese company, there is an automatic association with excellence and quality in Greece. We run a company image market research[1] every year in

Greece through an independent accredited agency, and we rank number one consistently for physicians in the therapeutic areas we are focusing on.

Looking ahead to 2020, what is the strategic direction in which you plan to take the company?

I would like to see Astellas Greece growing every year. I would like to maximize the value of our products and at the same time balance our resources internally and externally in order to advance new opportunities and launch new products in new therapeutic areas at the same pace as we have been doing so far.

Furthermore, from a macroeconomic perspective I would like to see steps toward establishing the required structural reforms that will allow the Pharmaceutical industry to strengthen its position as a significant growth factor of the Greek economy. In this environment Astellas wants to be a solid contributor fulfilling its corporate responsibility

Disclaimer: This article has been sponsored by Astellas Pharma Greece.

[1] OMNIBUS Research medimark, April 2016.

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