Interview: Clemens Schödl – General Manager, Gilead Austria



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Clemens Schödl, general manager of Gilead Austria, discusses Gilead's footprint and reputation in Austria as the leading global player in HIV treatment and what must be done to bring Austrian innovation into a new era to fully leverage Gilead's life changing treatments.

As general manager, could you introduce our international readers to Gilead Austria?

Gilead opened its Austrian office in 2006 and grew its presence in three phases. The first objective was to establish operations of Gilead within the country. The second step was to ensure the company was properly structured to deliver for our customers and their patients in Austria. The final step was to further expand on Gilead's long heritage in HIV and liver diseases and it is a very exciting time for the company as new challenges appear in the market. From a portfolio perspective, Gilead Austria provides treatment options for HIV, liver diseases, haematology and invasive fungal infections.

Since the release of Sovaldi®, the first ever interferon free treatment to cure the majority of patients with Hep-C, Gilead relied on scientific innovation to tell our story. We quickly learned that that wasn't going to work moving forward so we are in the process of evolving our communications approach to be more open and proactive. My role is also to strengthen our relationship with government leaders and market access stakeholders. My past experience working in external affairs roles within the Swiss and Austrian markets has prepared me for this challenge and I am

extremely motivated to put a spotlight on our products; among them the biggest game changers in healthcare for many years.

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How do you plan to further build Gilead's reputation?

Among the HIV community, Gilead's commitment to scientific innovation, and leadership is highly valued. However, our reputation in Austria did not extend beyond this segment of our portfolio so we had to build the reputation of Gilead Austria, essentially from scratch.

I would say that nowadays we are, thankfully, perceived differently, but this depends on who you talk to you. The HIV and Hep-C medical community, consider our products to be top tier and they would highly recommend us to anyone. Unfortunately, some health care system stakeholders have a one-sided view of us, which is sad to see when you understand the true lifesaving value for patients. Nevertheless, the challenge in is front of us, and my team are motivated moving forward.

How is Gilead positioned in the local market?

Generally speaking, we are well known in Austria, and our products are associated with high quality and their overall treatment value is understood. We are a market leader in HIV, driving forward well in Hep-C, and a humble but important player in haematology – in fact – in this area I am very happy to see that the team is acting in a responsible and accountable manner to serve patients in need.

Sovaldi®, is extremely well known, but the prevalence of Hep-C in Austria is rather low and the country, in comparison to other key markets, is relatively small. How do you plan on sustaining revenues in this segment?

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Q1 results of 2017 were very encouraging, despite the combination of a very low population prevalence of around 25,000 patients, and comparably low drug prices in the Austrian market, below the EU 15 average. Recognition of the value that our HCV portfolio brings to patients, the healthcare system and society in general is very important to us. We will continue working with the key healthcare system stakeholders to ensure patients receive and benefit from our innovative treatments, especially in the context of increased competition.

How do you evaluate Austria's capacity to reward innovation?

The basics are there. As the fourth largest European country, in terms of GDP per capita, we should be able to properly reward innovation. However, I believe the healthcare system is not set up to value a holistic view due to a socioeconomic cost-effectiveness approach and more of a silo perspective.

If you take a step back and look at the healthcare system, inefficiency exists in many areas. As a pharmaceutical industry, we must actively contribute to create meaningful change both for patients and for the healthcare system and payers in general. We also need to see reforms in the federal structure of Austria, in which hospital spending is currently controlled by the countries nine regions, but finally funded by the government.

As you have only been in the position for several months, what future ambitions do you have for Gilead Austria?

I am confident that, based on its philosophy of continuous innovation, Gilead will maintain its leading position in the HIV sector for years to come and, in addition to providing options to prevent HIV transmission (Treatment as Prevention (TaSP) and Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP)), may also be able to find a cure for the epidemic.

In Hep-C, our portfolio of products provides the opportunity of cure for more than 95 percent of patients. In Austria and around the world, we support the efforts of governments, professional organisations, patient advocacy groups, payors and healthcare professionals who have declared their intention and commitment to work toward the WHO goal of elimination of viral hepatitis by 2030.

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