Interview: Krzysztof Łokaj – General Manager, Chiesi Poland

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Krzysztof Łokaj, general manager of Chiesi Poland, discusses the positioning of the company as they become the absolute leaders in the respiratory field, driven by Fostex® and soon Trimbow®. Furthermore, he highlights the strategic importance of the nation for Chiesi globally, as well as his aspiration to further solidify the company as an integral part of the Polish healthcare ecosystem.

As the general manager, could you introduce Chiesi Poland to our international audience?

Chiesi entered the Polish market in 2004, after acquisitions of TORREX made by headquarters to start developing in the region. When I joined the company in 2012, Poland and Russia broke free from the CEE region and started to report directly to headquarters due to our larger sized market and future potential

At that time the 2012 Reimbursement Act caused an earthquake around the Polish pharmaceutical market, though it was more of a correction, rather than a crisis. 2012 was the first, and only year, that the Polish pharmaceutical market witnessed negative growth, and since has been growing by nearly five percent annually for more than 20 years.

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During this time, Chiesi has positioned itself as a global leader in respiratory and we are one of the three companies in the world with combination products in this therapeutic area. Our product, Fostex® in Poland, was the nation's top respiratory product in 2016 according to IQVIA and Chiesi aims to reach one billion EUR in annual sales by 2017 in Europe. Furthermore, we successfully have had Trimbow®, a three-way product to fight COPD, registered at the European level in July 2017, and hopefully this will enter the Polish market shortly.

At a structural level when I took over in 2012, we were forced to half-staff numbers and build a more efficient long-term business model for growth. We started to further educate our staff both in a medical and business sense, and from 2012 to 2017 our sales turnover almost tripled from 50 million PLN (14.03 million USD) to 140 million PLN (40 million USD)

What is the strategic importance of Poland within the region, especially after the international restructure of Chiesi in 2012?

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Poland is now much more exposed to senior management and we are perceived as a priority market for Chiesi. Currently, our strategy is to put in place our five-year plan – 2017-2022 – that is built around organic growth of the Chiesi portfolio, and that has roughly 50 products at different stages of development.

Additionally, we want to take advantage of acquisitions. Chiesi at a global level is active in looking for interesting global opportunities. Chiesi Poland is now searching for a local Polish acquisition; in 2016 we began the process, and we hope this move will take place in 2019.

What is the scope of Chiesi's operations in Poland?

We focus on three therapeutic areas; neonatology, transplantology and respiratory, our main growth driver making up 75 percent of our turnover. We are mainly centred around corporate products, and this is why our growth is fairly high. Furthermore, we believe that moving forward, we can develop our rare diseases footprint.

Chiesi Poland has also a strong potential for clinical trials, as the country is home to many well-educated physicians and has an excellent university infrastructure with many companies already taking advantage of these positive factors. Furthermore, conducting clinical studies and partnering with Polish centers as part of Chiesi's R&D process, is a way of generating better knowledge of our products in Poland, that makes it easier for market access authorisation down the line.

What obstacles have you encountered when attempting to obtain reimbursement for Chiesi's highly innovative treatments?

In Poland, reimbursement is a challenge due to a number of factors. Firstly, the GDP spent on healthcare is one of the lowest in Europe, resulting in less being spent on pharmaceuticals. Secondly, Poland for pharmaceuticals is a low-price country; therefore, during the negotiation process there are disagreements between companies and the Ministry of Health's (MOH) pricing expectations.

Nevertheless, Poland is moving forward and there are differing approaches to reaching the market. Companies can enter the market via the reimbursement list, providing an open market after the Agency for health technology assessment (AOTMiT) conducts a health technology assessment (HTA) and the MOH grants reimbursement – or – the other entry path is via drug programs for more specialised patient groups that require particular treatments or medical procedures.

What innovation are you bringing to the market that excites you most?

The key innovation we are awaiting is Trimbow®: a three-in-one treatment for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) combining the inhaled corticosteroid beclomethasone, the long-acting beta2-agonist formoterol and the long-acting muscarinic antagonist (LAMA) glycopyrronium. This will make us the market leader in respiratory, a first time for the company, and after the successful July 2017 European registration, Germany, the UK and some Nordic countries are awaiting market entry. We hope that Poland is also part of this group shortly, as this product opens up immense opportunities.

Furthermore, we are hoping to launch Envarsus®, used in kidney transplants, to grow our transplantology portfolio.

Chiesi is a purely innovative company that aims to improve the overall lives of patients. How do you position the affiliate to be the premier partner of choice for clinicians in each therapeutic area?

The patient centric approach is a cornerstone of our operations. Within the last five-years we have undertaken three major educational programs aimed at direct to patient education, while in the meantime acting as a portal for physicians to obtain and exchange knowledge.

Two of these key campaigns are in respiratory: "This is only COPD" and "This is only asthma", and another we have recently implemented for transplant patients. We hope in the near future to launch a program for parents of affected babies in the neonatology field.

What more can Chiesi Poland do to continually attract the eyes of HQ and drive forward the promising growth already experienced in Poland?

As aforementioned, our strategy is based around organic growth and acquisitions. We have an exciting pipeline of amazing products in new therapeutic areas; led by the aforementioned Trimbow®, as well as Holoclar® and Lamzede® in rare diseases. Alone this organic evolution will grow our sales by around 25 percent.

The second growth driver of local acquisitions, will take place over the upcoming years and can bring significant growth of sales and the overall organisation.

How would you like Chiesi to be perceived in the market as you impact the Polish healthcare ecosystem to a larger extent?

We want to be viewed as a purely innovative company, and the diverse portfolio and pipeline of Chiesi will allows us to reach this goal. Furthermore, we want to be perceived as a company that has a focus in speciality areas. Additionally, we must integrate ourselves more into the Polish market as our footprint heightens through the aforementioned acquisitions.

What do you like most about working for an Italian, family-owned company?

Chiesi is an extremely professional company that truly cares about the people. This, coupled with the diverse portfolio, excites myself and my team. The family ownership does not stifle any drive from HQ in Italy, but more enhances the company’s ability to be agile and make quick decisions to adapt to the ever-changing pharmaceutical ecosystem.

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