Teodoro Albarano – Chief Medical Officer & Vice CEO, Mavena, Switzerland



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10.01.2018

Tags: Switzerland, Mavena, Pharma, Skincare, Medtech, Internationalization

Dr. Teodoro Albarano, chief medical officer and vice CEO of Swiss skincare specialists Mavena, discusses why he decided to join the company after an illustrious career in Big Pharma, Mavena's internationalization activities, and the importance of effective treatments for psoriasis.

You decided to join Mavena a year ago after spending your career at Big Pharma companies such as Pfizer, MSD and Galderma, and also, you worked for Switzerland's largest private hospital group Hirslanden. Why did you decide to join this SME at this stage of your career?

I met a colleague of mine a year and a half ago, who is one of the former employees of Mavena. At the time, they were looking to instil more of a medical background and touch within the company that had only been created in 2014, so still very new. They needed to establish medical evidence, clinical studies and clinical evidence, and they needed an expert. At this time, I was medical director at Galderma Switzerland. I had developed a new product line and wanted to bring it to the market and Mavena offered the opportunity of a partnership. It was therefore a good momentum for me to move on to new horizons and adventures, and I was very attracted to being given empowerment to lead the clinical trials and clinical evidence on behalf of Mavena. Furthermore, I had built a large network as well, knew very well the KOLs, and could also bring on a new pipeline

to the company.

As you mentioned, Mavena is still a very young player in the dermatology field. Could you please introduce the company to our audience?

Mavena provides medical devices for topical application with clinical evidence for the treatment of acute and chronic skin diseases, notably psoriasis and atopic dermatitis; those are very much our fields of speciality. Our uniqueness lies in the fact we use natural products and ingredients. Even the active substance in our most important products is for instance Vitamin B12 with its proven anti-inflammatory effect is of natural origin and not a chemical sledgehammer like cortisone. We also use salt concentration of the Dead Sea and hamamelis extract, which is a natural product with light anti-inflammatory effects. Our medical devices are cortisone-free, paraben-free, color-free and fragrance-free.
In the future, we will enter into two new fields in dermatology, still with the same concept of IP's, natural ingredients and products.

What have been some of the major achievements this year for Mavena?

We are still in start-up mode! We opened an office in Germany in July and are developing and training our team there. Now they are going to perform. In Switzerland, we started with part of the team in April and we are now seeing the first results coming in October and November. Overall revenue is not what is too important for the first year, since the team was only complete by mid of the year. But what is quite remarkable and important to note is that we have been growing significantly over the last three months in Switzerland.
We are focussing on the market in Switzerland and Germany with the strategy of expansion first in the Swiss and German market.

Why of all the markets available do you want to focus on Germany?

We want first to show the proof of concept in Switzerland and be strong in our own market here. It is however not all of Germany we are focusing on; we are focusing on two regions in particular, in the southern part of the country: Bavaria and Stuttgart. If we can show we are strong in Switzerland and these two regions in Germany, we will expand to other German regions. In Switzerland, we are present only in the German speaking part. Next year maybe we will expand to the French speaking part.

Let's talk about your field of activity, psoriasis. We know it is a terribly disabling disease affecting 2-3% of the global population. What are you seeing insofar as

scientific advancements in this area?

If we speak with physicians or pharmacists, they see one part of the disease and it is not related to the severity of the disease. There are people suffering from psoriasis with mild symptoms. These patients are completely stigmatized and isolated from society, suffering from very complex problems. You cannot cure this disease, but we want to improve patients' quality of life. Our products are not only for the lesion, we want to offer products for the whole body for example adapted shampoos for the scalp. We want to give patients medical solutions and they can use some of our products or adapt the products currently in use. In the end, it is important that the patient has the best treatment solution. Our slogan is: "Show your skin again, be proud to have beautiful skin". It is not only to treat the lesion but to have normal skin.

In your field, it is not purely about curing patients, it is centred around patients' overall quality of life. As chief medical officer of Mavena, how are you able to portray this message to the relevant stakeholders so that they factor this into the reimbursement decisions?

It is very complex. We have a strategy of not going after reimbursement of our products. It is very difficult, maybe even impossible, to get reimbursement. As the authorities are looking to save several millions over the next two years, the relief component of our products will never be factored in… despite the fact people are really suffering from this disease. When we develop our products, we are focused on patients' needs, not the products themselves. We then go to our laboratories and brainstorm the best solutions for patients.

Competition has intensified in the psoriasis field. While this is positive for patients, for the companies it is of course more challenging. How do you set Mavena apart?

Without a doubt, it is all about evidence-based medicine. What does this mean? First, you need to have good clinical data. So you need high quality clinical trials and to be published in peer-reviewed journals. The expedience of healthcare professionals is also important, as well as that of patients.

We are focused on solutions for children and babies as well, avoiding the use of corticosteroids. It is a challenge to develop products with natural ingredients and keep them stable in the final formulation. Our goal is not to use alcohol, perfume, colorants and so on. Formulating products using natural ingredients may be tricky, since these natural ingredients don't always smell very good.

On the one hand you have the pure pharma medical companies, and on the other you have dermocosmetic companies. It seems the silos are breaking down. Do you think companies like L'Oréal and Pierre Fabre DermoCosmetics really have the medical evidence to show the value of their products to the medical community? Do you see these silos as breaking down?

This is also a challenge for us. We want to show that we have clinical trials and that our products have proven efficacy and safety. But at the patient level, concerns are also different meaning if they have a topical treatment, they want to put the product and immediately move on to something else. They don't want to apply the product and wait 20 or 30 minutes for skin resorption. It has to be easy action and immediate action. If the best products are not used, you do not have efficacy. So having a product with a high safety and efficacy profile along with a cosmetic touch is important.

What products in your portfolio are set to generate the most revenue in the coming months?

I would say essentially our B12 product lines, with our B12 Acute Gel for acute neurodermatitis, B12 Crème for chronic neurodermitis and our B12 Ointment for psoriasis. These products are based on a patented technology to transport the big anti-inflammatory molecule Vitamin B12 to the deeper skin layers where the effect is needed. Then, the complementary products to really provide this full solution such as Mavena Hydro Shower Gel and Hydro Shampoo, Mavena Scalp Mask and more.

What do you expect to have achieved in five years when we return?

We want to increase our presence in other countries in Europe and we want to launch new products in dermatology. We will develop products with clinical evidence only and we will not launch any cosmetic products – that is for certain.

Switzerland has an amazing reputation in the field of dermatology overseas. Why do you think this is?

Switzerland is very strong in innovation. There are leading universities in Zurich, in Basel, in Bern, in Geneva, in Lausanne, and in the dermatology field, our institutions perform well above their weight (?); they are passionate about innovation. They are fast and creative and still reliable. These are all qualities that make the environment really special in Switzerland.

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