Interview: Kyriakos Mikellis – Country Lead Cyprus and Malta, Pfizer; President, KEFEA



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With more than 25 years of experience, Kyriakos Mikellis is actively involved in the Cypriot healthcare environment as the President of the Cyprus Association of Research and Development Pharmaceutical Companies (KEFEA) as well as the Country Lead Cyprus and Malta for Pfizer. He shares in this exclusive interview the important contribution global companies are bringing regarding the establishment of GeSY, the national healthcare system of Cyprus and to improving patients' access to innovative medicines.

KEFEA is the association for research-based pharmaceutical companies in Cyprus. What are the main activities and current priorities of the association?

Created in 2006, KEFEA is a rather new association representing the research based pharmaceutical companies in Cyprus. The organization was established after Cyprus became a member of the European Union in 2004 as we realized that there was a need for innovators to be present in the market as a unified group.

From the start, our priority was to work towards the improvement of the medical treatment that Cypriot patients get. With the knowledge and experience of our European partners, we worked, in collaboration with other stakeholders, in improving access to new medicines. We wanted and had an active participation in shaping the pharmaceutical environment in Cyprus. Presently, our aim, and since the country is also in the process of reforming the healthcare system, is to secure a transparent procedure to be followed in entering the system and improving patients access to new

innovative medicines.

Indeed, GeSY is on everyone's mind at the moment. In what way is KEFEA supporting its members and participating in the current discussions?

From the start and that goes well back as KEFEA, we were involved in all stages of the discussions, we organized workshops and a number of meetings with various stakeholders. Our goal was to provide a positive input to the discussion and ensure that GeSY will be implemented in a way to serve patients interest at its best. It is not an easy task, but it is the first time that the establishment of the system is secured by law. Therefore, by June 1st, 2019, the first phase of GeSY will be launched and I hope that this time will be implemented.

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We have tried all these years to convince other stakeholders and the decision making bodies that the new system must provide better services in comparison to what the people get today. I hope that this message got through and decisions will be taken towards that direction. We know that different committees will be established and we would appreciate to see them work in a transparent way with specific regulations, clear timelines and procedures. If this be achieved, we believe the access to innovation will be easier and faster.

As we all know, a major issue for any health system today, is how to secure the necessary funds. Everyone involved in this project knows that Cyprus traditionally allocates a very low percentage of the public expenditures to the health sector and much lower than the EU average to medicines. Thus today, we must, and I mean every stakeholder, to work towards the improvement of that allocation. Satisfactory funding must be in place to safeguard, first of all the first stages of the system and to secure stability in the future.

Looking more at Pfizer's activities in the country, what have been your key priorities since taking over as Pfizer Country Lead in Cyprus?

Pfizer's key priority, and in line with KEFEA, is to make sure that patients have access to our medicines. We are an innovative company that develops first in class or the best in class, medicines and we want to see our innovation be used and improve patients' lives. This, in my opinion, could only be achieved through collaboration with the interested stakeholders, by putting patients first and improving the quality of their lives.

Globally Pfizer ranks first amongst all MNCs, how would you assess the performance of the affiliate over the last few years?

Pfizer is ranked amongst the top pharmaceutical companies in the country. In terms of revenue, unfortunately the way the health system operates in Cyprus, with the two separate sectors, public and private, it is difficult to have accurate data. With a wide range of products, small moleculars, biologics, injectables and biosimilars we addressed different disease areas, cancer, autoimmune

disease, rare disease, stroke prevention, infections, smoking cessation and with the use of our vaccines portfolio, for children and adults, serious disease, like meningitis and pneumonia can be prevented. The last few years we had the introduction of new innovative medicines in the market, like tafamidis for familiar amyloidosis, palbociclib for breast cancer and meningitis B vaccine which apart from helping patients, had a significant contribution to our performance.

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You have been working in the industry for 25 years and at Pfizer for the past seven years, where would you like to see Cyprus and Pfizer Cyprus in five years?

In general, I would like to see Cyprus continue the good performance in relation to the economy, to have growth and to improve its social responsibilities. For our area of interest, hopefully the reform of the health sector will be completed and a stable health system will be in place to serve patient's needs. Cyprus is far behind in terms of clinical trials compared to other European countries. It is not easy for a small country to establish a research and an environment favourable to attract clinical trials. Hopefully with the presence now of four medical schools an improvement will be seen in this area as well. As Pfizer and as KEFEA, we would like to further develop this segment by creating stronger collaborations with health centres and medical schools.

Regarding Pfizer, we are aiming at strengthening our position in the market. Moreover, with the current changes to the healthcare system, we are eager to continue to play the key role we have set as a strong and positive contributor to the health care environment. Personally, I am proud to work in this industry, improving people's lives. I believe that, as Pfizer, we can have a positive input in the development of healthcare sector in Cyprus.

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