Ewan McDowall – GM, Ipsen UK and Ireland (July 2014 – June 2018)

The UK is in itself a global life sciences hub and looked up to by the rest of the world. We have here the opportunity for great partnerships with academia and thought leaders and the possibility to attract great talent, from the UK, but also from abroad

27.08.2018

Tags: Ipsen, UK, Ireland, Pharma, Manufacturing

For Ipsen, the UK is one of three global hubs, with manufacturing in Wales in which it is continuously investing, as well as large-scale R&D activities near Oxford. Ipsen's general manager for the UK and Ireland, Ewan McDowall, tells us the company's focus remains on attracting and developing great talent, and empowering the team to drive strong performance.

Two years ago, Ipsen changed its global CEO. David Meek has laid out a new strategy with a revenue target of greater than EUR 2.5 billion by 2020 and a goal to launch at least one new product or meaningful indication each year. How does this global strategy trickle down to the local level?

It's important to say that David's leadership style encourages empowerment of affiliates so that our global leaders work alongside our country teams to create together the vision of where we want to be, it is not a traditional top-down approach. Our affiliate, the UK & Ireland, firmly aligns with Ipsen's global vision that patients do not have time to wait. We are therefore very patient focused, and this is what drives our everyday work and underpins our ambition to deliver one new product or indication each year.

What is the significance of the UK affiliate for Ipsen globally?

The UK operations of Ipsen constitute one of three main hubs for the company globally, the other two being in France (Paris) and the USA (Cambridge, M.A.). Our operations here include R&D based near Oxford and manufacturing in Wrexham, Wales, as well as UK Commercial Operations and global functions including HR, Tech Ops and Commercial Operations in Slough near London.

All in all, Ipsen's corporate hub in the UK has a very substantial footprint with about 600 employees, and 200 patents filed from our R&D site. Our manufacturing site in Wales generates our neuroscience medicine Dysport® which is distributed to 56 territories worldwide.

The UK is in itself a global life sciences hub and looked up to by the rest of the world. We have here the opportunity for great partnerships with academia and thought leaders and the possibility to attract great talent, from the UK, but also from abroad.

In terms of growth: if the UK life sciences business is growing at 3.3 percent, we are growing three times quicker. In 2017, we improved our result by more than ten percent to reach GBP 80 million (USD 106 million) and are expecting similar growth in 2018.

It is to be noted that we do not have a consumer health division in the UK, as is the case with most other affiliates, but we are amongst the top five affiliates for Ipsen globally.

What main priorities have you set yourself for your tenure?

For me, it all comes down to people: how can we retain and attract the best people in the industry, reaching within the life science space, but also beyond those rooted solely in pharmaceuticals. In the last four years, we have set a high bar in terms of the talent joining Ipsen, seeking to make this one of the 'best places to work'.

I believe we are able to attract great talent because at Ipsen, you are empowered, and you can make a difference very quickly. Patient-centricity is one dimension, but we are in a very dynamic and exciting phase and have an attractive proposition for our employees. This chimes with the profile of the people we look for: employees willing to take accountability and move fast.

We have been able to attract talent from numerous larger competitors, people bringing with them strong and diverse international experience.

Ipsen announced last year that you would be investing another GBP 22 million (USD 29.34 million) in your Wrexham manufacturing facility. What benefits do you see in manufacturing in the UK and why this major investment now with Brexit looming?

We currently have 340 people working in North Wales and are the biggest pharmaceutical employer in the area, and that number is to grow to around 600 with the new investment.

As the facility produces medicines for our neuroscience franchise, it is also a very specialised business area and we want to ensure we continue to invest in it to maintain accessibility to treatment for patients. While uncertainties resulting from Brexit are inevitable, the UK is and will remain an important corporate hub, continuing to be incredibly important for Ipsen in the future.

In the last 12 months, we have recruited 15 percent more people, many in senior and global positions based at our Bath Road (Slough) office. With a strong and growing presence in the UK, we are preparing for all eventualities, including a hard Brexit. That is the most prudent assumption and we are focusing on two priorities: avoiding any disruptions in patient supply, and supporting our people working in the UK.

The third component of Ipsen's UK hub is its R&D activity near Oxford. What are the benefits of your cross-functional presence in the UK?

We work in collaboration with our manufacturing and R&D sites, through a cross-functional UK management forum, which brings together site leaders across the UK, reflecting our values as One Ipsen. This allows us to share expertise and move forward together, whether the subject at hand relates to something internal or is linked to external stakeholders.

NICE has recently recommended your Cometriq (can we have something more recent here, RCC 1L?) for thyroid cancer to be part of the NHS programme. What is your approach to working in partnership with the NHS, NICE and other stakeholders to ensure that no patient has to wait?

I personally believe in the NHS, and as a company, Ipsen recognises that we share a common goal: to do whatever is in the best interest of patients. Therefore, it is essential we collaborate in order to advance the innovation and new technologies that the NHS requires to help British patients. In our partnership with NICE, we collaborate with the process to ensure that, in the end, patients, no

matter how many or how few are affected by a given condition, find treatments available for them.

I think that the important point is that we work in partnership with technology appraisal bodies, striving to find the best solution rather than condemning them for not having sufficient resources to reimburse every medicine. It is the only way we can bring treatments to patients at the end of the day.

Every system in every country has pros and cons, but each system is different, and we have to do the best we can with ours. In the last few years we have worked hard to ensure our medicines are made available to as many patients as possible and believe that reimbursement is critical to leaving a meaningful legacy for patients to access in years to come.

Amongst your therapeutic areas, which ones hold most importance for Ipsen in the UK and where do you identify most growth coming from in the future?

They all remain of equal importance. Our biotech mindset – combined with the scale and advantages of a global biopharmaceutical company – has already established us as a development and commercial powerhouse in our core focused areas, with a proven ability to bring new, life changing therapies to market. Our focus on growth and expansion has solidified the foundation for our future, particularly in oncology, neuroscience and rare diseases.

What gets you out of bed and motivated every morning working for Ipsen?

I love spending time with my team. They challenge me, and this is something I value daily. In my recruitment efforts, I have always strived to find people who could one day be my boss. I reckon that I have succeeded in recruiting several people at Ipsen, strong leaders that one day could be CEOs of biotechs or pharmaceutical companies, I am confident of this. My role is to help them achieve high levels as quickly as possible and let them flourish. That is why I get up in the morning.

What legacy do you wish to leave at Ipsen?

I hope that in years' time my team will look back on their career and say 'the time I spent at Ipsen was one of the best experiences I had'. We won't always get everything right, but this feeling is something I strive to create for all 120 people who work for me and extend it to all 600 employees in the UK.

A final message about the UK for the world?

Stay focused on the facts. The UK is a very clear life sciences leader globally and boasts huge amounts of talent. It has a healthcare system we should be proud of and that is respected on the global stage.

See more interviews