Guillaume Recorbet – General Manager, Servier Morocco



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Guillaume Recorbet, general manager of Servier in Morocco, explains Servier's special status in the Moroccan pharma industry as a multinational company with a historic and extensive manufacturing footprint in the country, shares his three priorities to return the affiliate to the right track after a tough period following price cuts, and talks about the hurdles to bringing innovative therapies to Morocco.

Could you start by introducing the current footprint of Servier in Morocco and its strategic importance for the group?

Servier’s affiliate has a strong history and footprint in Morocco’s ecosystem and more generally in the African region. Servier has been present in Morocco since the 1970s, and next year we are going to celebrate our 25th anniversary as an affiliate here! It all started with a partnership with Maphar in 1970. The subsidiary was officially created in 1995, followed by the establishment of our production plant in Nouaceur in 2003. As a result, our Moroccan affiliate integrates all the key activities of the pharmaceutical value chain from production to promotion, except for R&D activities.

As a multinational company with local manufacturing, we enjoy a special position on the market. Thanks to our historic presence and extensive footprint, we are considered as a very key partner for authorities.

How strategic is your manufacturing site for Morocco and the region?

Our manufacturing site is an extremely strategic asset for Servier, which is why the Group has continually invested in its expansion. Covering an area of 13,000 square meters, the site opened in 2003 with an investment of about 5.7 million euros. Two years after, it was certified by the ANSM, the French regulatory agency for drug safety, enabling us to export to France. Since then, Servier has invested 8.5 million euros to progressively increase production capacity to 13 million packs currently. The site now produces more than 20 pharmaceutical specialties. Half of our production is intended for the Moroccan market, and half is exported to France and countries in West and Central Africa. Since 2006, we manufacture drugs for Biogaran, our generic brand, for the French market, and exports to the West and Central Africa region began in 2007.

As a flagship manufacturing site in the country, it showcases Servier’s commitment to ensure Morocco’s sanitary independence by securing the availability of medicines for Moroccan patients, but also to contribute to the overall industrial and economic strength of the country through investments in new technology, training, and exports. We are producing at our site in Nouaceur more than 95% of the medicines drugs sold in Morocco, hence paving the way in terms of quality of our processes and quality of our medicines to the benefit of the Moroccan patients

Moreover, the site enables us to broaden the scope of transversals such as human resources, pharmaceutical affairs, finance or IT.

What strategic priorities did you put in place when you became GM of Morocco in October 2018?

My first focus has been to create added value as a corporation but also as a local actor in three distinct categories: economic, social and therapeutic. First, we aim to bring added value from an economic standpoint, in other words, increase the profitability of our operations. In addition, we aim to bring added value from a social perspective, ensuring compliance and responsibility from our collaborators. We need as well to contribute to help Moroccan society by building up strong partnerships with local associations that aim to take care of social causes as children's education.

A few months ago, we began a collaboration with the association Enfance Maghreb Avenir to contribute as much as we can to build children schools in some disadvantaged areas. Last but not least, we must continue improving our therapeutic added value, in other words our ability to bring therapeutic solutions to Moroccan patients, always putting patients at the heart of all our activities. Every day, over 600,000 patients in Morocco are treated with Servier's medicines. Increasing our therapeutic added value also means contributing to the Moroccan medical scientific community. Recently, we regularly support the publication of research papers during many international congresses.

As this is your first adventure leading an affiliate, what have you learned about what makes an affiliate successful, especially in a developing market like Morocco, and the leadership qualities of a GM?

I noticed that French people coming to Morocco can easily fall into the trap of assuming that Morocco will be similar to France. Even though people speak French and it is geographically close, the two countries are radically different in terms of mindsets, ways of working and social attitudes. Indeed, society is quite hierarchal, and it has to be taken into account while dealing with social interactions. These elements are key to understand when collaborating with Moroccans. Considering these points, it can be hard to challenge people, and the bottom-up culture is not common. It is critical to find the balance between respecting the ego while challenging it to transform the mindset.

When arriving in a new affiliate, defining one's own strategy and leadership style is key, but what is also crucial is that it cascades to every part of the affiliate. Recently, Servier rolled-out an initiative to involve all its employee in defining the Group's new vision, mission and values together. We took this initiative as an opportunity to continue to transform the Moroccan affiliate.

After a good year in 2019, we need to continue reinventing ourselves, focusing on the three aspects aligned with our local strategic orientations: productivity, execution and transversality. We must convince our collaborators that being agile and transforming our mindset is key to our success and will serve our vocation: we are committed to therapeutic progress to serve patient needs. I have to confess that I’m lucky to work with such a committed and expert team.

How has the affiliate been performing?

The price cuts that took place in 2012-2013 have led to a decline in our turnover for several years. Despite the situation, we managed to return to growth thanks to the implementation of a new business model. Our very positive recent results confirm that we are on the right track. Growth had been led by our hypertension portfolio with new launches, followed by diabetes medicines and finally our venous drugs and cardiovascular medication for anginas and heart failure.

Pricing strategy is crucial to succeeding in the Moroccan market. Launching new medicines at the right price level enables successful market penetration. Over the last few years, we have been able to launch around two per year, but we aim to accelerate the pace by potentially launching nine new drugs by the end of 2024.

During your studies at HEC, you were a laureate in the Smart Pharma Prize on the topic ‘How to optimize the business of mature products?’ In the Moroccan context, how do you optimize the business of Servier’s mature portfolio?

Indeed, Servier has a mature portfolio from which you need to squeeze the most out of each drug. In order to do so, the focus should be on promotional impact by explaining why our medicine is the right choice for patients. Furthermore, we focus on the consistency of our portfolio by following a product line extension strategy: new product launches complement existing drugs, thus boosting our mature portfolio.

After acquiring the oncology branch of Shire and forming strategic partnerships, Servier has made great strides in oncology with the launch of Oncaspar and Onivyde, and Olivier Laureau told us he is hopeful that in the future oncology revenues will be on par with those from cardiovascular treatments. In Morocco, are you planning to bring your

innovative oncological treatments?

Morocco is working towards achieving universal coverage through the Health Plan 2025. Reaching universal coverage is an objective shared among all actors in the healthcare sector. Nevertheless, there is still a long way to go to reach this goal. Without proper reimbursement, the vast majority of Moroccan patients cannot have access to innovative oncology therapies, even though they might be registered on the market, as they do not have the means necessary to shoulder the cost of treatment. In the difficulties of getting reimbursement, companies cannot bring their innovative therapies profitably on the market. However, as health coverage progresses, I am confident that Servier and other biopharma companies will reassess the situation. Our aim is to bring innovative cancer treatment solutions to Moroccan patients as soon as possible.

What do you aim to achieve during your time at the Moroccan affiliate?

We reached our objectives in 2019 with a record turnover. We expect to continue on this positive trajectory.

Besides the financials, we need to continue transforming our ways of working to move from a top-down model to a bottom-up culture. I believe that our transformation is already paying off as people are more comfortable to take initiatives and we are definitely making a day to day reality our 4 values which are: dare to innovate, commit to succeed, care and grow by sharing.

What do you value the most working for a company like Servier?

As an independent international midcap pharma company, Servier’s culture is quite different than Big Pharma companies. I love working for Servier because people are encouraged to share their ideas, to reinvent themselves and to bring added value by contributing to create new processes and workflow, which is extremely motivating! Being committed to the therapeutic progress to serve patients need is one part of the inside motivation shared by all my colleagues and myself.

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