Roxana Botea – Country Manager, ViiV Healthcare Belgium & Luxembourg



ViiV Healthcare has a unique positioning both in Belgium and worldwide as the only company 100 percent dedicated to HIV, with a strong commitment to leave no person living with HIV behind

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Roxana Botea, country manager of ViiV Healthcare in Belgium and Luxembourg, shares her experience joining the organization after a long career experience with GSK and her priorities as a first-time country manager. Furthermore, Roxana Botea elaborates on the company's strategic direction of focus to improve the quality of life and disease management of patients living with HIV.

You have had an extensive career working in the different therapeutic areas of GSK across various countries. How did you find the transition coming into the ViiV Healthcare team but also as a first-time country manager in a new market?

It has been a great journey within the GSK group – the main shareholder of ViiV Healthcare. Starting my career in GSK as a brand manager and taking on increasingly complex roles, I tried to learn as much as possible from each area and bring the learning with me to the next role. Having worked in many of GSK's therapeutic areas, it was only natural that my next step would be to enter an exciting field such as HIV.

The transition into this role gave me an opportunity to learn a lot about a new therapeutic area which I find to be very dynamic and interesting. Each day I am amazed by the passion of people living with HIV and healthcare stakeholders, working together to combat the disease. Becoming country manager in Belgium also gave me an excellent opportunity to learn about the Belgian

market and understand the local dynamics, as it is my first time in the country.

What are your current priorities for the affiliate?

As the country manager of ViiV Healthcare in Belgium, I am responsible for setting the direction for the affiliate and ensuring that we remain focused on the mission of not leaving any person living with HIV behind. This entails bringing innovation to the market as quickly and as widely as possible and engaging with all relevant healthcare stakeholders in Belgium including authorities, prescribers, nurses, associations, and of course the people living with HIV.

What is the scope and scale of ViiV Healthcare's operations in Belgium?

ViiV Healthcare has a unique positioning both in Belgium and worldwide as the only company 100 percent dedicated to HIV, with a strong commitment to leave no person living with HIV behind.

ViiV represents a third of the total HIV market in Belgium, being the second biggest player in this competitive field. All this with a small and agile team and with great support from our colleagues in GSK.

How is the company's global portfolio of 14 HIV treatments represented locally and what have been the major developments in new product launches?

Our portfolio is well represented in Belgium, as this is one of the first countries in Europe to reimburse innovative treatments like our most recent launches, the 2-drug regimens. This is possible thanks not only to the quality of our innovations, but also the high valuation that the Belgian authorities have for innovative solutions.

While modern HIV treatments have achieved a high level of efficacy with limited side effects, we believe innovation can still help in addressing the evolving needs of the people living with HIV and in reducing the burden on their quality of life now and in the future. Therefore, in 2018 we embarked on a journey to introduce new solutions that reduce the number of drugs that patients take on a daily basis while maintaining a similar efficacy as the established treatments. In this new paradigm, we were able to introduce 2 new medicines in 2019.

Very recently one of ViiV Healthcare's innovative products, a long acting HIV treatment, attained its first marketing authorization in Canada. How will this product play into the company's solutions offering for HIV?

Today, people living with HIV can have a normal life by taking one pill once a day – the current standard of treatment. But there is more we can do. So our next step in innovation is reducing the frequency of administrations for HIV treatment.

30 years ago, being diagnosed with HIV was like a death sentence. HIV is a field with amazing evolution and the speed of innovation has turned it into a chronic disease. This means the needs of patients with HIV are changing. This population is aging, and it is important that they will be able to manage their treatment on long term. In other words, while efficacy will always remain crucial, we also need to find ways in which we can reduce the impact of HIV on the daily life of people and ultimately find a cure.

How would you assess the current level of access to healthcare for HIV patients in Belgium?

In general, the Belgian authorities value innovation regardless of the therapeutic area. We are in a fortunate situation because the reimbursement dynamics of Belgium allow for access to innovation and the structure allows patients to get the medicines they need.

For HIV, the level of care through reference centres is very high – which has allowed Belgium to make a strong progress versus the 90-90-90 goals. However, there is more we can do: to continue the efforts in terms of prevention, to decrease the number of late presenters and optimize their treatment, to retain patients in care, to manage the needs of an ageing population, to fight stigma – with the overarching goal to make HIV an as small part as possible of people's life.

With the increasing pressure on the healthcare budgets, we at ViiV know we have our share of responsibility to make innovation accessible and sustainable. We also believe that, by offering treatments containing fewer drugs, we play an important role in reducing the healthcare cost burden, while maintaining similar efficacy as with established treatment options. A key example is the recent launch of our newest 2-drug regimen, which proposes significant cost savings versus the most used standard treatments containing 3 drugs.

Belgium is a key player in Europe when it comes to clinical development. Is this an area in which the Belgian affiliate of ViiV Healthcare is active? How involved in Belgium's life science ecosystem in the affiliate?

Absolutely. Belgian experts are recognized worldwide for their innovation and contribution to advancing this therapeutic area. ViiV offers the possibility to all Belgian centres that have the capacity and standards to participate in pivotal late-stage R&D trials with our major drugs and drug combinations. As a result, many of the Belgian HIV reference centres participate in those studies.

In terms of local research, we sponsor national cohort studies collecting real-world evidence for our novel combination therapies – as part of our collaboration with BREACH (Belgium Research on AIDS and HIV Consortium). We support several academic investigators – initiated clinical and preclinical studies, as well as numerous projects with healthcare professionals and reference centres. Belgium is also one of the countries where we are supporting research for finding a cure.

ViiV also has strong collaborations with patient associations, as we have a major role to play in addressing stigma and increasing awareness regarding HIV.

Partnership is the fundamental component of ViiV Healthcare's foundation – we are committed to forging unique collaborations that advance treatment, care and access to HIV medicines.

What working culture and team dynamic do you aim to establish within ViiV Healthcare to achieve success locally?

I was enthralled in the ViiV culture from the beginning because it is focused on driving innovation and access via an agile and dynamic team. In our small Belgian team, we are committed to making this culture live by listening to the needs of healthcare professionals and people living with HIV and constantly evolving our activities to better support them. Besides living the values we share with GSK (patient focus, respect for people, transparence and integrity), we reward courage, accountability, development and teamwork.

Looking forward to the next five years, what objectives are you aiming to achieve as country manager?

First off, I want to make sure we have a very strong partnership with Belgian stakeholders. This means understanding what drives value and supporting them to achieve their goals. With my team,

we will do our best to make HIV a smaller part of patients’ lives. With our medicine launches, we will work to ensure that the value of our innovation will be recognized. In the medium term, we will continue making sure no patient with HIV is left behind by answering the current unmet needs, especially in populations with very limited treatment options such as heavily treatment-experienced patients. At the same time, we continue working to improve the quality of life of people living with HIV and supporting efforts to find a cure.

My team and I are here to make sure that the innovation from ViiV reaches all relevant Belgian healthcare providers and people living with HIV, fast and effectively.

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