Jakob Skaarup Nielsen – CEO, Healthcare DENMARK



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Healthcare DENMARK is a non-profit organization and public-private partnership representing Danish healthcare stakeholders internationally. Jakob Skaarup Nielsen, its CEO, highlights the Nordic country's "treasure trove" of health data, the efforts to digitalize even further and the population's open mind when it comes to participating in clinical trials. Moreover, he outlines the organization's work to serve as the gateway to Danish healthcare and life science expertise and innovation.

Can you begin by introducing Healthcare DENMARK and its role within the Danish life sciences ecosystem?

Healthcare DENMARK is a public-private partnership, a non-profit organization, representing key stakeholders including government, universities, and private stakeholders within Denmark's healthcare system. Our mission is to promote the holistic approach of the country's ecosystem internationally, acting as the gateway to Danish healthcare and life science expertise and innovation.

We build the narrative of Denmark as a showcase for successful healthcare and in this narrative, we include the many different key strengths possessed by the Danish healthcare sector. Within this context, the public-private partnership element is key since the Danish healthcare system is publicly financed and provides the same care to all citizens regardless of who they are; the Prime

Minister and the gardener of the official residence both go to the same hospitals and see the same doctors. While the system is public, it is supported by private initiatives, companies, and innovation.

Is Healthcare DENMARK's focus more on investment coming into Denmark or outward?

Healthcare DENMARK focuses more on awareness and level of interest rather than materializing specific investments. Our mission is to promote the country on a broad level and create interest, allowing other stakeholders to go further. We participate in conferences and typically set the scene to connect stakeholders, providing information about the eldercare sector, hospitals, and e-health, for example, and then we include experts in any given area to provide detailed information.

The organization focuses on dialogue with international stakeholders and decision-makers; as a non-profit organization, Healthcare DENMARK does not sell any products or services. We organize delegation visitor programs for foreign decision-makers and press delegations with an exclusive opportunity to experience innovative Danish solutions in practice.

As a relative newcomer to the role and without a background particularly linked to healthcare, what mandate were you given upon taking over as CEO?

Healthcare DENMARK launched a new strategy this year and I was lucky to be offered the position as part of this transition process. The organization is focusing on countries where Denmark has the biggest potential for partnerships both in government and commercial settings, they are key markets in Europe, Asia, and North America. We have a broad international mandate that entails proactive work with several key markets.

Looking at Denmark as an investment destination, it is a small country with a small domestic market and population, but it has a lot to recommend in terms of data, hospital infrastructure and clinical trials. What key selling points do you bring up during your conversations with international stakeholders?

Indeed, you just mentioned a few of Denmark's selling points. The country is a treasure trove for health data because of the civil registration system and blood cell data banks; the Danes are very open-minded in terms of participation in clinical trials. The Danish hospital sector is also keen to

participate in innovative technology and medicine development.

It is generally easy to roll out life science initiatives in Denmark because of the transparent administrative system, flexible labour market and competitive tax rates for R&D. For example, Roche recently published a document as part of their 50th anniversary in Denmark explaining why the company does so much R&D in the country. It was not surprising considering the strong relationship that exists between public and private stakeholders.

Denmark is one of the most digitalized countries in the world. Internationally, we are seeing a great convergence of products, technologies, and services across sectors. A large part of solving tomorrow's healthcare challenges is about combining various technologies including e-health, and Denmark is well positioned for that future. We have a shared medication record that connects hospitals, GPs, pharmacies, and social care plus a national agency for e-health under the Ministry of Health. The country definitively needs to be able to harvest the opportunities of digitalization to solve healthcare challenges.

What are the countries you are seeking collaboration with and the niches where Denmark can excel?

The largest market for Denmark in terms of pharmaceutical exports and life sciences is the United States, by far our largest export market. Novo Nordisk, for example, is a huge exporter of insulin and diabetes medicine for the US market.

We also have Germany, France and the UK as key markets in Europe, and China, Japan, and Korea in Asia. China, like other big countries, is a huge market where the burden of eldercare and increase of chronic diseases is putting pressure on the healthcare system.

How does Denmark plan to stay ahead of the competition, maintaining your position as a digitalization front runner, at a time when many countries have now seen the value of digitalization as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?

If you look at the back end of the hospital system, including the whole logistics chain, IT systems, and operations systems, patients are only the tip of the iceberg and 90 percent of the work is done below the surface. That is where optimization can happen through digitalization, new technologies and ways of doing things. Good care, innovation and efficiency are in the best interest of every

party.

Denmark has – through a series of timely investments – a very strong digital infrastructure. It was this infrastructure that enabled Denmark to, within a period of only a few weeks, to have a solution in place for COVID-19 test management of the entire Danish population. This infrastructure has enabled Denmark to stay at the forefront of digitalization and the continuous development of this infrastructure – for example by utilising new international standards such as FHIR – will also enable Denmark to stay there.

Looking at the 2020 Global Innovation Index, Denmark is in sixth position ahead of countries such as Finland, Germany, and Korea, but behind the Netherlands, the UK, Switzerland, and neighbouring Sweden. What is the country's innovation offering today and what are the areas in which it can improve?

Within life sciences, we are top of the class in some medical devices, pharmaceuticals, IT solutions and digitalization. For any company, where the interaction and trust between public and private synergies is of interest, Denmark is an ideal place; it is how our system is built.

In terms of improvement areas, just as in any country, we could be even more agile. In clinical trials, organizations must get approvals from the various regions and several authorities. We can optimize and speed up processes because time to market is of great concern to foreign investors; we could look to countries such as Germany, the UK, or the US for inspiration.

Having been in the role for a few months, what goals would you like to achieve during your tenure as Healthcare DENMARK's CEO?

We have three strategic must-win battles: the first one is increasing awareness in our focus markets and key partnership countries about the Danish healthcare system; the second objective relates to the relevant stakeholders, key decision makers; and the third is working to be a fully digitalized organization. We are developing a digital visitor centre and a digital conference centre where people can have meetings and interact.

Working to spread the word on Denmark's good solutions within healthcare is a source of constant inspiration.

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