Sergej Kammerzell – CEO, SIS Medical



Switzerland has a nimbus of innovation and is known for its love of precision

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Sergej Kammerzell, CEO of SIS Medical, a medtech company dedicated to developing, producing, and distributing innovative high-performance PTCA Balloon Catheters, shares the vision that led to the creation of the firm and what the next steps in its development are.

Could you begin by introducing yourself as well as SIS Medical and its area of focus?

I have been working in the medical device business since 2003. Prior to my current role I worked at B. Braun in the Aesculap Division where I held a variety of positions until 2014 when I joined PULSION Medical Systems. Working in various companies – from big multinationals to mid-sized firms – helped me to realise that I enjoy the agility and flexibility that comes with working in smaller companies. That is why, when the opportunity came, I joined SIS Medical as CEO.

SIS Medical was founded 14 years ago. Our founder had the brilliant idea of making super high-pressure balloons for coronary angioplasty. Before that, most balloons for dilatation of heart vessels held ten to 15 atmospheric bars. Our first balloons held between 20 to 22 atmospheric bars, but our founder has since come up with the idea of making a double wall balloon, like a balloon inside another balloon, achieving 35 bars. For context, car tyres are generally between two to three bars, while bike tyres are between five and six. Our balloons are the equivalent pressure to 350 meters below sea level; too much pressure even for most submarines.

Our key product is the OPN-NC super high pressure PTCA Balloon. We are the holders of two patents and 14 years on, even as a small company, we are still ahead of the game, as none of our competitors have yet been able to come up with similar products.

How has the company developed since its foundation?

The company has shown a tremendous development and has grown consistently over the last few years. However, 2020 was a big setback for every company, ours included. We did our own research and compared our revenues with some of our major competitors and whilst on average other firms saw a 30 to 40 percent drop in revenues due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our revenues only dropped by 20 percent. It was a tough year, and we are still trying to recover from it.

Can you tell us more about the business model the company has implemented?

We have a direct sales business model in Switzerland, but we work with distributors in all our other markets. We are now actively looking for potential partners in the Percutaneous coronary intervention (PCI) business in the US.

In which countries are your products currently present? What have you identified as key growth markets moving forward?

Our products are currently present in 50 countries including those in the European Union, Switzerland, UK, and international markets such as Russia, Vietnam, India, and the Middle East. We are also working on US registration and finishing the tests for FDA submission and are expecting clearance between February and March next year; a very promising development. China and Japan are also key markets for our expansion. Our geographical footprint is very important and securing our presence in these three markets will bring our company to the next level.

The Swiss brand is built into your name (Swiss Interventional Systems). What advantages does this give you when you take your products to global clients?

Switzerland has a nimbus of innovation and is known for its love of precision. In fact, Schaffhausen – a very well know area for watch manufacturing – is just 30 kilometres away from where we are

located and a significant percentage of our cleanroom workers who assemble our smaller catheters used to work for companies such as IWC Schaffhausen. In terms of talent, we can count on valuable employees who are used to working in precision-oriented environments

Does being based in a very high-cost country like Switzerland presents challenges in terms of selling your products in countries where costs are more constrained?

Wherever you are based there is going to be price pressure. Since our main double wall balloon is so unique we are able to sell it at a much higher price than a regular balloon, and this is the main reason why we can afford to be based in Switzerland. If we were manufacturing regular balloons, it would be much more of a challenge.

What are the advantages of having such a high-pressure balloon compared to the standard balloon for coronary angioplasty?

In just a single country such as Germany, tens of thousands of patients undergo coronary angioplasty every year, and numbers look set to continue to rise due to growing incidence of coronary hypertension and obesity. Around 20 percent of these patients not only have cholesterol in their coronary vessels but also calcium. These patients needs the far higher pressure that our balloons offer for this calcium to be removed.

In terms of the costs of removing calcium deposits, doctors therefore have a choice between using very expensive technologies costing thousands of Euros or our balloons which cost around 800. This is how we position ourselves; realistically, our solutions are not for every patient, but they are good options for this task.

In terms of product portfolio, are there any new technologies and solutions SIS Medical is currently developing?

Our R&D department is also working very hard to bring the same high-pressure technology to calcified below-the-knee arteries, which are currently making cardiologists’ jobs very difficult. This same need also exists for interventional radiologists fighting diabetic feet, those patients who have relatively healthy hearts but are barely able to walk. Having our products registered for peripheral interventional application is going to be one of our next big steps.

What has been your proudest moment so far with the company?

I always feel very proud when I am in the cath lab. Once a month, I go and visit a customer and when I watch one or two procedures. If a doctor tells me that they would not be able to achieve a good result for their patient if it were not for our balloons I feel extremely proud of our work.

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