BIOSIMILAR DEVELOPMENT

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Stakeholders To Gather In London To Plan Biosimilar Market's Future

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Since I entered the biosimilar space a few years ago and began traveling to U.S. conferences, many have asked me if I travel abroad to any European events. And my answer has always been, "Sadly, no," which I'm aware is a crime to admit given the past and ongoing success of biosimilars abroad. Whenever I ask which events are the best to attend overseas, the answer has been, overwhelmingly, the Medicines for Europe Biosimilar Medicines Conference.

This year, The Biosimilar Medicines Group, a Medicines for Europe sector group, will host its 16th annual conference, "Biosimilar Medicines: Unlocking the Full Potential of Biologics" from April 26 to 27 in London. While I will be unable to attend the event once again this year, I was thrilled to have the opportunity to chat with Carol Lynch, previously the global head of biopharmaceuticals for Sandoz and current chair of the Biosimilar Medicines Group for Medicines for Europe, about the upcoming conference.

Lynch, who has been with Novartis for more than 20 years and now serves as President of Sandoz U.S., Head of North America, joined the Sandoz division four years ago as head of biopharmaceuticals. At the same time, she became chair of the European Biosimilar Medicines Group. As chair, Lynch is responsible for ensuring the organization has a unified vision to support and carry the industry forward. One of the most important goals of the group is to "rally the troops to get them all involved in the biosimilar market," Lynch told me.

It's appropriate, therefore, that she'd be included in the opening panel of the Biosimilar Medicines Group conference entitled, "Biologic Medicines Ecosystem: Outlook 2030." During this panel, Lynch will join in conversation with a patient advocate, an oncologist and professor, an expert from IQVIA (formerly QuintilesIMS), and a European Commission policy officer. She

expressed excitement about engaging with a wide variety of stakeholders in person, both during the panel and throughout the conference. "We create an open forum to exchange perspectives that can help break down the silos that may exist on the national or subnational levels across and within other countries."

Lynch expects one of the biggest themes of this year's conference to be how to approach the inconsistencies among different nations — and, indeed, that has been one of the biggest struggles for Medicines for Europe to date. Overall, the EU market has made great progress in the past few years — even since the 2017 conference. But the different nations often boast unique payer policies, contract different medicines, and reveal varying levels of stakeholder education and comfort. "This conference aims to foster approaches to deal with these inconsistencies by revealing what has been successful in different settings," she explained.

A number of notable examples of EU uptake come to mind, including Norway's success, Italy's new reimbursement structure, and what occurred a few years ago on the hospital departmental level in the U.K. "Examples like these show you that the secret sauce, if you will, or the recipe for biosimilar adoption is pretty similar but shows up slightly differently, depending on the health care system within which you're working," said Lynch. Indeed, one of the biggest goals for this year's event is to continue the dialogue on "how everybody can decode this information and understand their role in creating a vibrant and sustainable biosimilar market."

When asked which of the myriad of stakeholders she's most excited about hearing from, Lynch laughed because it was like asking her to say which was her "favorite child." As you might expect, it is challenging to pick one because, as we all know, the biosimilar space is dependent on all stakeholders working together rather than singling one out. She did mention her particular interest in hearing from the patient advocate on her panel who is representing three different organizations — The International Foundation for Integrated Care (IFIC), European Forum for Good Clinical Practice (EFGCP), and Healthcare Quality Improvement Partnership (HQIP). "Patients are probably the stakeholder I get the least access to," Lynch offered. "So, I love to hear directly from patients. They're so well-informed and it's great to check in and see what the general opinion about biosimilars is, as well as the general level of awareness and the belief systems that are currently in place."

Another aspect of the conference Lynch is looking forward to is hearing from her panel-mate, Per Troein of IQVIA, who will share an overview of biosimilar uptake across the different EU regions and global markets, along with earnings, trends, and the factors responsible for market successes. This presentation will uncover and address any surprises that occurred over the past year. For instance, Lynch said one of the biggest topics of discussion during last year's conference was how the oncology biosimilar space would fare as the market braced for the arrival of two rituximab biosimilars.

"It's safe to say the adoption of oncology biosimilars has moved a lot faster than anticipated," Lynch said. "It's going to be exciting to hear all stakeholders' perspectives on how these biosimilars have been received. It will also be a good opportunity to determine which areas continue to be barriers post-launch and to peel back the layers to understand the reasons for any stakeholder hesitations."

When I asked Lynch what she thought of when she heard the phrase, "the future of the biosimilar industry," she expressed hope that every patient who could benefit from a biologic would have the opportunity and access to benefit from that medicine. Obviously, there is still a ways to go before this dream becomes a reality — though, every year, different nations in the EU are putting the policies in place to make this a reality or at least a possibility for the future. And, in a few weeks in London when representatives of all the stakeholders come together on stage and in the audience, Lynch expects to walk away with a few more keys to unlock future biosimilar success.

To learn more from Lynch on the future of the biosimilar industry, look into the upcoming Biosimilar Medicines Group program. And, for those of you who are unable to attend this year, I intend to follow-up with Lynch and several other speakers about their biggest post-show takeaways and surprises. Stay tuned!