

2011

Dutch Life Science & Health
Conference

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& Health **Conference**



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Plenary Session

Interesting lectures were held on the 7th Dutch Life Science & Health Conference, Utrecht The Netherlands. A first lecture, given by Dr. R. Pauwels – CEO of Biocartis, focused on ‘Personalized Medicine’ attempting to support more specific and successful treatment of patients by upfront identification and selection of ‘responders’ for a given drug. This is in response to the current general understanding that only about 50 % of the patients respond positively to a given drug treatment. Better diagnostic tools can help to improve the appropriate selection of patients prior subjecting them to drug therapy. Biocartis develops a new tool for daily routine use in hospitals that can analyze samples for up to 25 elements simultaneously. Current focus in the product development is to assure at least similar sensitivity and specificity of the test as the standard individual tests of today.

A second lecture was given by Dr. R. van Leen, Chief Innovation Officer DSM NV. He addressed the dramatic increase in health care cost, which doubled over the last decade. In Health Care focus is shifting towards improving Quality of Life, home care and regenerative medicine.

Addressing the increased cost of care evoked a lively discussion on its root causes and ‘risk management’ was raised as one of the malefactors that has led to an extremely costly development system. There is a clear trend and desire to move away from the ‘no risk development’ approach to reduce costs. As an example Prof D Collen, who was invited to speak about his experience with ThromboGenics, mentioned that his company hired over the last 18 months about 50 new people, all in regulatory/quality affairs, but none in research. All of this just to cope with the need to compose and complete the required files for regulatory submission: they completed a dossier of some 35000 pages just for 1 product! Also, they needed to spend some 120.000 € to verify if the chosen product name was free and available for use. Money spent on these kind of regulatory aspects cannot be used for research and product development, and it is the question if it helps to improve quality of the product

In today’s world 1 € spent on research will ultimately require another 8-9 € to industrialize the product. With the current economic developments, there will be cost reductions and budget restrains obligating us to collaborate more together. One option was to outsource activities more to existing groups rather than to establish a new group of specialist in-house. Another opportunity will likely come from novel diagnostic tools to improve the efficacy of drugs by applying it only to upfront identified ‘responders’.

Workshop on Medical Devices.

In the afternoon Workshop on Medical Devices, Drs B. Blokhuis from MedtechPartners, illustrated the selection process of his group for novel projects and to present these to the Partners to find financial support to further develop the concept. Following his introduction Drs A.P. van Liere (Unitron), J.de

Ruiter (IQ+ Medical BV), Prof.F.J. Beekman (CEO Milabs) and Ir.J.Lamers (CEO Nucletron BV) illustrated their 'successes' within their respective companies.

At Unitron, they focus on non-implantable medical device development for other start-up companies which do not have the production capacity themselves. The company upfront selects which projects they want to join, after they did an appropriate risk assessment and market potential. Upfront analysis of the total project (from concept to marketed product) by all disciplines is essential to foresee as early as possible potential problems.

At IQ+ Medical, they look into current available products or products in development but where the customer basis can be enlarged and where they can re-engineer the concept towards a more practical, more acceptable, more appealing format. Similarly to Unitron, they carefully select the projects to work with: only those where a large customer potential can be reached are picked up. Many of their activities are outsourced, e.g. the manufacturing itself. They raise their own money by licensing the novel idea of the existing application. A practical example was given as the Qmax urine flow meter, which is today a simple but very unhandy tool to be used only by clinicians to identify a growing prostate. They re-engineered the product towards a simple to use tool, to be used at home (in relaxed and private environment) by which man can identify himself the status of the growth. The whole system is disposable in an environment friendly way.

Prof.F.Beekman is CEO of Milabs, which focusses on molecular imaging. They claim to be much more accurate than standard SPECT, PET which are developed for man: they developed the imaging tools for research purposes in mice and rats! This way they improved the resolution 1000 times and reach a resolution of < 0.5 mm for SPECT and <1 mm for PET. Fundamental academic funding was needed to get started, but now interest is raised and many orders comes in. On a question if Philips approached him already to acquire the technology, he responded that he indeed met regularly different people from the company over the past years but that they likely are still considering how to best approach him. This illustrates the bureaucracy of large entities which slows down the fast progress and implementation of innovative concepts.

Finally Ir.J.Lamers from Nucletron illustrated a successful application in the Brachytherapie to treat prostate: heat production from inside seems much more efficacious than using X-rays from outside. The growth of their market is still 8% per year. They measure in every country the local customer level of appreciation/satisfaction and compare this with the local financial results to allow them to take appropriate actions. They reorganize in the countries where they see a mismatches: ultimately the success of the company is all in the 'people' and it starts with hiring the employees: good people hire good people, mediocre people hire mediocre people. Their focus is to reinvest in R&D and to save money in all kinds of support functions! Their success is the result of their focus on the abilities of their technology, to use it in different other applications and to bring it to market by looking at the benefits for the physician and patient. Nucletron is now acquired by Elekta and obviously there will be additional reorganizations taking place.

Take home messages:

My take home message from the lecture of Dr.R. van Leen was to include the focus on Quality of Life assessment, cost and labor of care into the development of future clinical trials.

The take home message for me from the lectures from the Workshop on Medical Devices is that careful selection of the concept is key to start a successful development of a unique novel product; then focus on the different abilities of the technology and careful marketing/networking are essential to approach a wide customer basis.

Above all, careful thinking along the way on 'how things can be implemented' is key to maintain efficiency at low costs.