ERIK HAEFFLER, RECIPHARM

Erik Haeffler is Vice-President Manufacturing Services & Head of Sustainability at Recipharm. He is responsible for the Group's sustainability work, as well as its focus on operational and commercial excellence. As part of his role, Mr Haefler is continuously developing a model for working with multi-site projects and is accountable for operations development across the company, including elements such as project management resources, corporate IS and project/product sourcing decisions.

In this interview, Mr Haeffler discusses how the pharma industry can balance optimising environmental sustainability with maintaining the highest safety and efficacy standard for achieving its main objective of promoting patient health and wellbeing.

Q Why is it important for pharma to be a sustainable industry? Surely healthcare is so important to people that pharma's environmental impact is secondary?

A Ultimately, the purpose of pharmaceuticals is to improve patient health and quality of life. The pharmaceutical industry is a responsible one, and this is particularly true when it comes to its environmental impact. The work our industry does is vital, but nonetheless these operations should be carried out in a responsible way to minimise any potential negative environmental impact. It's a balancing act but there are ways we can reduce the impact of operations and as an industry we are committed to exploring these options.

Q Looking at the big picture, what would you say are the most significant sources of major environmental impact that pharma can address to improve sustainability?

A Pharma has been working on environmental issues for a long time. The most significant impact on the environment comes from manufacturing pharmaceutical products on a commercial scale. Although systems and governmental regulations are well developed in Europe, the US and Japan, there are still ongoing problems in other markets, particularly in other areas of Asia, where pressure to manage damaging levels of pollution is not as concentrated.

One particular area of concern is the manufacturing of antibiotics since emissions of the antibiotic compounds can drive antimicrobial resistance. This means taking care of hazardous waste, sewage and emissions remains absolutely critical for the industry. Another area that seems to get less attention is what happens to medicines that have expired or are no longer in high demand. From an environmental perspective, it is important that these unused drugs do not follow the same routes of normal household waste. This is something that could potentially be improved in many parts of the world. It's important that authorities and governments support the industry in developing processes to help resolve this.

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Q A pharma company whose drug delivery partners and CDMOs offer sustainable products, technologies and services will produce more sustainable end products. Where can drug delivery partners and CDMOs offer that increased sustainability?

A This is something which needs to be carefully balanced. It is important to make sure we do not compromise on the medical efficacy of an end product by altering the way it has been manufactured. That being said, manufacturers should always strive to reduce any environmental impact throughout the manufacturing process and the supply chain, where possible.

Co-operation between manufacturers of end products and the original suppliers of materials is constantly developing. With this in mind, it is becoming increasingly popular for the industry to apply a "Supplier Code of Conduct" to a product, to set the boundaries and expectations regarding any sustainability matters.

When it comes to the technical aspects of pharmaceutical production, a lot of focus is being placed on scale and improving the efficiency in manufacturing processes. Improving yields from the processes means there will be less waste, and by optimising scale of production, the overall environmental impact can be reduced significantly.

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optimising scale of production, the overall environmental impact can be reduced significantly. Replacing hazardous materials is also important – new technologies for wastewater treatment and filtering of solvent emissions are constantly emerging making the processes much cleaner. In addition, supply-chain practices, such as reducing the number of suppliers involved in the production of a product, are providing opportunities for reducing transportation, which is beneficial when it comes to reducing the industry's impact on the environment.

Q Where do you think the driving forces for improving sustainability are coming from?

A Currently, the driving force for exploring greener processes is primarily coming from within the industry itself. This is a direct result of the global focus on improving sustainability, with both governmental regulations and the procurement standards from payors adding pressure for sustainability concerns to be a priority. So far, the attention from patients and healthcare professionals is limited, however this is likely to increase over the coming years.

Q Can you envisage a time where patient or healthcare professional treatment preferences could be influenced by how sustainable one option is compared to another? i.e. could sustainability be a product differentiator in competitive markets?

A Ultimately medical efficacy should be the top priority and vital medications need to remain readily available. However, there may be a situation where sustainability could be the deciding factor between two brands. In addition, there has been discussion around potentially introducing payment systems designed to give benefits to companies that can clearly show advantages from a sustainability point of view, and it is likely this will be explored further in the future.

Q In addition to regulating to enforce sustainable practices, what role can regulators play in adapting or even relaxing some regulation to enable more sustainable approaches?

A It is important that we don't start to mix assessments of safety and medical efficacy with sustainability aspects. Sustainability is vital for pharmaceuticals, but it should not be part of the medical assessment of a product. Patient safety and effective treatment needs to remain our top priority.

ABOUT THE COMPANY

Recipharm is a CDMO headquartered in Stockholm, Sweden with development and manufacturing facilities in France, Germany, India, Israel, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, the UK and the US. The company continues to grow and expand its offering for customers. Employing around 5,000 people, it is focused on supporting pharma companies with its full-service offering, taking products from early development through to commercial production. For more than 20 years, it has provided pharma expertise and managed complexity for its clients throughout the entire product lifecycle.

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Erik Haeffler
Vice-President Manufacturing Services & Head of Sustainability

Recipharm AB
Box 603
10132 Stockholm
Sweden

www.recipharm.com