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In this episode, Taren Grom, Editor-In-Chief of PharmaVOICE magazine meets with Dr. Deborah Dunsire, President and CEO at H. Lundbeck A/S.

Taren: Dr. Deborah Dunsire, welcome to the PharmaVOICE WoW Podcast program.

Dr. Dunsire: Thank you, Taren. It's great to be here.

Taren: We're delighted to have one of our red jackets be with us on this program. So it's very exciting to speak with you. Deborah as CEO of Lundbeck what do you hope to accomplish within the next year? And then a follow up on that, what is your longer term vision for the company?

Dr. Dunsire: Lundbeck is a company with a 115-year tenure as a company and in the last 70 years it's really had a focus in neuroscience and diseases of the brain and so that's something that we will continue. It is our vision that every person be able to be their best and their life not be interrupted with brain disease. So, we'll be continuing to focus on a broad range of brain diseases, psychiatry and neurology.

In the next 12 months we'll be moving some products forward in our pipeline. For instance, in posttraumatic stress disorder, which is an area that's growing and has no adequate therapies as yet, but we'll also be strengthening the pipeline of Lundbeck through external partnerships, licensing or acquisition. And so I think you'll see us make moves on the strengthening of our pipeline as we go forward.

Taren: The focus on the brain disease is that what drew you to the company? I know that's one of the areas that you have been focused on over the last several years.

Dr. Dunsire: Well, Taren you and I have known one another a long time and you know that my passion is for helping people attain new medicines where the medicines can be transformative and where we have high unmet medical need and brain disease is certainly one of those frontiers. I really believe that we're at the beginning of a new wave in brain diseases. We're beginning to understand the biology much better and beginning to be able to think about subsets of patients that we can get the right therapy for a given subset of patients and so really start to make transforming differences. And so I'm excited about

the coming decade in neurosciences because these diseases have really not had completely transforming therapies in decades.

Taren: We have known each other for quite some time and a couple of years ago that you had said something to me that stuck and you said we are entering the decade of the brain and where we are going to find more and more medicines to help treat those who haven't been able to have been treated before. So, are you still optimistic about that?

Dr. Dunsire: I am. I don't think it's here today, but I can see the beginnings of that moving forward and I think we've seen in neurology getting some subset to patients. Sometimes the rare epilepsies have a genetic background. We're beginning to understand the genetic background of more diseases. In psychiatry, that's a little bit earlier even, but through genome wide associated screening and other technologies, machine learning, artificial intelligence we're beginning to be able to go through the huge body of data in various databases and start to see patterns that will help us even in psychiatry to begin to subset patients, so I am optimistic.

Taren: It's exciting times ahead, so I wish you continued success in your pursuit. And I say this with all respect, but unfortunately you are one of the few women sitting in the CEO position of a major pharmaceutical company still today and I know we've talked about this in the past as well but as a result, you really are such a role model for thousands of women. What was your journey like to get where you are?

Dr. Dunsire: You know it's been tremendously interesting I guess is the best word I'd use to describe it. I didn't have a plan. Fast forward, I came into the industry thinking I would be there temporarily just gaining a little knowledge and understanding, but I was captivated by the degree of different skills that are required to bring in new medicine forward and I was captivated by the opportunity to work on diseases with no therapy. And so in pursuing something that I just found intellectually and emotionally captivating I went on a journey that I never expected.

And so I have worked in multiple different countries – South Africa, Switzerland, New Jersey, Boston, they're the same country, but different places and now in Denmark and across the world the commonality has been bringing forward those new medicines that can be transforming. Throughout that journey, I've had a lot of different responsibilities from starting in clinical research because I have – I'm a physician by background and that's often where physicians would start, but I've been exposed to global marketing, leadership of sales and marketing, new product planning and ultimately company leadership bringing together all aspects of the value chain from basic research all the way through bringing medicines to patients.

And so through that different exposure I've gained not only a tremendously interesting day-to-day work, but the utterly rewarding experience of being able to change the lives of patients through new medicines.

Taren: It's been fascinating to watch your career. If it's for anything, you know now that you wish you knew then as you were moving up the ranks.

Dr. Dunsire: If I think about that, I'd say in the early years of my career I was perhaps a little bit too much of a perfectionist and that generates a tremendous amount of stress. The one thing I've learned is that together we're stronger, so absolutely counting on the other different skill sets that exist within our companies and trusting and relying on those different skill sets and not feeling so much I had to do everything myself. It would probably be something I'd like to have started sooner in my career than I did.

Taren: You touched on just something a minute ago too about being physician, how has that influenced your career aside from the technical pieces of it? But you bring a different dimension to every role that you've taken on and we think because of your training.

Dr. Dunsire: Well, I think the training helped tremendously in understanding the diseases in context in how they're going to be treated and who's treating them and in having in many cases treated my own patients with those diseases. So, the presence of the patient's mindset in understanding how medicines will be used with the patients and by patients I think is something that the physician experience accentuate. It's certainly present with that throughout the industry and not unique to the physicians in the industry I found across functions.

Everything from finance to clinical research to sales and marketing, patients are critically important. People in this industry are driven by the mission of helping patients. But I think having treated them myself gives it a different perspective.

Taren: As a CEO, you really do set the culture and the trajectory for the organization. What kind of culture do you want to engender at Lundbeck? You had mentioned it's a 100+ old company, so it has some established ethos already, but where do you see you bringing change?

Dr. Dunsire: I think it comes back to what I really believe about our industry, we're better together that one of the things that certainly exists at Lundbeck that I'd like to continue to cultivate and strengthen is that spirit of collaboration, of sharing across different disciplines because while each discipline is extremely specialized and we need that specialization and strength the cross fertilization of ideas and questions, the debate if you like about what is the best way forward, why are we going to take one set of risks for

an expected set of benefits versus another set of risks that goes everyday in drug development is a day of risk.

We don't know when the next experiment will fail, so keeping that communication across all functions within the company and that collaboration and that ability to really debate with one another, but then decide on the course forward is one of the things that I'll continue to cultivate at the company.

Taren: You talked about the failures in drug development and working in this specific area that you are with the brain, how do you keep yourself, as well as your teams buoyed, because there are so many inherent risks in the paths that you take and failure is more often the result than success is.

Dr. Dunsire: No. I think, again, passion around the mission. I think when we as an industry fail, I think our obligation is to understand why and what could have been done differently and to take the learning forward and that's I think the spirit that I see that people are wanting to make a difference for patients and when we find out that a path forward is close that we didn't achieve our objective, the redoubling of effort and determination that we still have a job to do, we still have to find the path forward because these patients are in need I think that keeps people focused forward and then I think that relentless ability as scientists as a scientific industry to drill down and understand why.

What is it that we can learn? How can this even though it didn't achieve our said objective, how can it be a stepping stone forward to the next opportunity to bring forward a transforming medicine? And that it does require resilience. I do remember the chief scientific officer that I worked with at Millennium Joe Bolen always used to talk about particularly in bench research you're really in the arena of where most experiments will fail and the failure is important because it tells us what we have to do differently to create the next new medicine.

Taren: Fantastic. You have had many accomplishments in your career, can you identify one wow moment that helped shape your journey?

Dr. Dunsire: The wow moments have always been around patients and what the medicines have done for patients right from when I started back in South Africa in the late 80s working with Sandoz on organ transplantation and seeing patients who could really not live a normal life with an organ transplant, able to be at the transplant games and living a much more normal life with new therapies with the launch of Gleevec at Novartis, the first, the targeted oncology agent.

I still correspond with a woman who was in the phase 1 trial of that drug. She's now 20 years out having chronic myelogenous leukemia that was going to kill her and she's alive

and not only that, alive and still working and running to raise money for Leukemia & Lymphoma Society. Those are the people who inspire me. I've just been in correspondence with her this week for her next marathon and she is a source of inspiration to me in an ongoing way.

For me, the wow moments have always been about when we are able to be successful transforming science into medicine. It creates life for people and that's what we want for our patients facing brain disease. We want people to be their best and that's why we work everyday.

Taren: I ask this question of everyone who does the podcast and I know it's a bit of a layup, but I'll ask it anyway. What drives your passion in healthcare and it's got to be patients. Tell me some three words in your mouth, but...

Dr. Dunsire: I think I put those words right out there.

Taren: Right. Amazing. That is an amazing story. I cannot believe after 20 years you're still in contact with the patient. I think that's just wonderful and it's a testament to you really to be so open and being willing to receive correspondence and then responding back to somebody. That's an amazing story.

Dr. Dunsire: She's an amazing lady.

Taren: How do you define success for yourself?

Dr. Dunsire: Many dimensions, but I think one is that work should be a part of your life and not your whole life, so success for me is also you know I look at all dimensions. I look at the spiritual dimension, the family dimension, friendships and the tapestry of life and work and here we're mainly talking about the work, but I think success is much more than we are as people, much more than what we work at and then within work. Obviously, we've talked a lot about the success being can we make a difference for people who haven't had adequate therapies and in the therapies we can bring forward, but then there's the people within the industry and as a leader one of the ways that I look at success is where are the people who have worked with me and for me over time and it's so rewarding to see people that I've worked with now as CEOs of biotech companies.

I think about Anna Protopapas. I think about Nancy Simonian. I think about Hugh O'Dowd. It's a lot of people that have worked with me and for me have gone on and grown. When I think about being a leader within the industry, the success is also measured in the growth of people within the industry to take our industry forward.

Taren: That's a lovely legacy to have. If you had to pick one word to describe yourself, what would that one word be?

Dr. Dunsire: Probably curious if you boil it down to one word because it's what's always driven me is understanding what we can do to help patients. It comes down to understanding the science, understanding how to think about drug development, understanding how to reach physicians and patients who are going to use the medicine and I've had to learn so many new things over the years and the ability to enjoy that learning and to reach in and try and understand what do all the disciplines that we work with do, what's different about this disease, what's different about this approach to the disease that's being proposed by our research and it's also being a part of my moving globally the curiosity to understand how is healthcare delivered in different countries and how can we work as an industry globally. So, I guess I'd settle on curious if there was only one word.

Taren: I think it's a great word and let's talk about that global experience for a second as well. You have noted in the past that having that kind of global exposure is so important to someone to move their career along. We live in such a connected world today. Do you think that global experience still is really important to get to that next step?

Dr. Dunsire: I do and I think that we are in an age of in some ways more and more virtual experience, but there's very little that can truly replace the experience of being in a place and I'm going through that first hand with the move to Denmark. Denmark and Copenhagen has been part of my experience as a global executive going to conferences or visiting affiliates, but living in a place and working in a place and understanding the impact of national culture, national policy, how business is done in an environment and what has that yielded and how can that greatness be taken forward and learn from and how can it be supplemented with experiences from outside.

I don't know another way to get that except for being in the environment and I think it forces you to challenge your assumptions. One of the things that brings – I call it brain plasticity, but change in your thinking is the exposure to new ways of doing things that you don't necessarily expect will work but do work. And one of my experiences there was working with Takeda after the acquisition of Millennium by Takeda and experiencing the Japanese business culture and being inside it understanding much more about how it is strong, but also seeing ways that it can be supplemented by international experience and I think that's the way to generate positive change.

Taren: Are there any CEOs you look to for inspiration since you're such an inspiration to so many others?

Dr. Dunsire: I appreciate you saying that. I think one of the people who truly inspire me and unfortunately is no longer with us is Henry Tamir and I got to know him – I was privileged to get to know him in Boston and to see how he built a company, how he focused on diseases – again, transforming areas and building a business that transformed lives for children with enzyme deficiencies, but built a great business and he also was a person who not only built the business, but built the people within the business.

He also took his role and a stand as I think we must as industry executives in being a spokesperson for the industry and being very articulate in positioning our industry and being able to portray the great things that this industry delivers for human health. So, he's been a tremendous inspiration for me.

Taren: That's lovely and I think his loss was felt throughout the industry. I think you're correct there. Finally, you were named Healthcare Business Women's Association Woman of the Year in 2009, can you describe what this recognition has meant to you personally and professionally?

Dr. Dunsire: Well, even as you say it now and we're you know 10 years later it still gives me goosebumps and I think the reason why is that it is a recognition from one's peers and it's a recognition that comes from nomination from people who work with you. That in itself is incredibly heartwarming and rewarding and uplifting. And then there's the recognition that comes as a panel of extraordinary women who have tremendous careers and who have given their time and their effort to be part of the HBA and to drive the HBA forward, review the nominations and make that selection.

There's a tremendous feeling of being uplifted by one's peers and that's incredibly humbling, but also incredibly rewarding. So personally it meant a tremendous amount and for my career it's something that I think has allowed me a platform to speak about the value that diverse teams i.e. including women can bring to the work that we do and that's a platform that I take very seriously.

Taren: Wonderful. Deborah, thank you so much for joining us for our WoW Podcast program. It's been a delight to speak with you.

Dr. Dunsire: It's always a pleasure Taren. Thank you so much for including me.

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