

Health and Medicine

IN THE GREECE OF THE FUTURE

KONSTANTINOS M. FROUZIS WAS RECENTLY ELECTED PRESIDENT OF SFEE, THE HELLENIC ASSOCIATION OF PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANIES. MR. FROUZIS DISCUSSES THE ROLE HEALTH, MEDICINE, THE STATE, AND PHARMA AND HOW ALL STAKEHOLDERS CAN GAIN FROM A COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIP.

Undoubtedly, for many years the pharmaceutical expenditure of Greece was at high levels, especially during the years 2007-2009. Structural problems, deficiencies, and a lack of control systems plaguing the health system in our country, as well as those involved in the drug chain—including pharmaceutical companies—primarily contributed to this phenomenon.

We, as Pharma industry, fully recognizing our role and assuming full responsibility to the extent attributable to us, initiated a sincere and essential dialogue with the Ministry of Health and other healthcare stakeholders in 2009. Our aim was to reverse the upward trend of pharmaceutical expenditure in Greece and contribute to develop a healthcare system that would remain sustainable, just as our industry would. The outcome of this effort—which to date we have disproportionately undertaken—is that the pharmaceutical expenditure has been reduced in 2010-2011 by approximately 2.5 billion Euros, that is, by 40%, and it is expected to be further reduced by more than 500 million Euros.

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At the end of 2012, pharmaceutical expenditure in Greece may be among the lowest in Europe. However, our sincere contribution to the reduction of pharmaceutical expenditure is not possible to continue to the same extent, as the pharmaceutical industry cannot solely afford to carry the burden of the total healthcare savings requested by the State. Let us not forget that “sick funds”?? drug expenditure is only 16% of total health expenditure, 40% of the total costs of pension funds, and hospital drug costs are just 13% of the total costs of public hospitals. Therefore, if we are really interested in the rationalization of healthcare expenditure, the State should put things in proper perspective. Thus, any measures to be taken must follow a more rational course, ensuring that each participant in the distribution chain will contribute in proportion with their shared accountability. The medicine and the health sector in general can be the main trigger for creating a new economic development model in our country. It is clear that the urgent priority of the State should be the completion of the technological updating of the health system to completely eliminate the waste of money and mismanagement. The mobilization of the best scientists and the use of the most proven technological processes must be implemented immediately, so that the period of the great loss of valuable resources gives way to the full utilization of available funds and ensures a high level of public health. In the era of digitization, it seems paradoxical that we have made the issue of full digitization of all transactions in health “the bridge of Arta,” —something starting and never ending! The benefits arising from the successful completion of this process are too numerous and substantial to let valuable time pass. It must be the first priority and main objective for the State if it really wants to succeed in reducing the waste of money in the health sector. A considerable amount of money will be saved and this will be an excellent investment, with multiple reimbursements in the areas of national economy, employment, promotion of research and innovation, medical tourism, health promotion and upgrading the quality of healthcare services provided to the citizens of Greece.

Simultaneously, however, to achieve this goal, new initiatives should be launched to encourage growth and investment in the health and medicine sector. The pharmaceutical industry in Greece (Greek and multinational) has developed dynamically over the past two decades. In Greece, drugs are manufactured and exported to 100 countries worldwide, approximately 250 interventional clinical trials are conducted, i.e. an investment of 85 million Euros, while the pharmaceutical companies contribute to our country’s GDP and provide high quality and high level jobs to some 25,000 workers.

This important achievement should be addressed as an “introduction” and a beginning of a new era of investment and growth. Within the next decade, we can put our country on the map of the global pharmaceutical industry as a strong regional center, which consists of the following pillars:

- Attracting investment from multinational and Greek pharmaceutical companies
- Increasing the number of clinical studies conducted in our country as well as of the wider domestic research and development of pharmaceutical products
- Development and implementation of programs in cooperation with the Greek State and the European Union for the pan-European dealing with serious, health related social issues that significantly affect the sustainability of our country, for example, the issue of the aging of the population

These objectives certainly cannot be achieved without building a high level of trust between the pharmaceutical industry and the State.

SFEE is seeking a lasting and open deliberation with the Government on all issues. Following such a responsible attitude on our part, it is surprising to see the State



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take unilateral decisions and horizontal measures that do not contribute productively to the effort in achieving our joint goal—to develop a sustainable health system.

One of the main reasons that Greece struggled to operate competitively in the Eurozone is the relationship of distrust between the State and the business sector and the lack of shared vision, planning, and cooperation. It is clear that one of the leading options for overcoming the crisis and ensuring the position of the Greek economy in the European context is achieved through the abandonment of these outdated and counterproductive attitudes. The State must ensure that its measures do not interfere detrimentally to the future health of companies. The debt and the bond’s haircut settlement of the health system to companies, the transparent and rational prescribing choices, avoiding pricing measures that lead to spillover the other EU countries and creating incentives for investment in R&D and production are just some of the options to be adopted, so as to ensure hope and vision for a strong and robust economy of health in Greece. 🍷