

Treating the symptoms of modern life

Although people living in western countries enjoy longer and healthier lives than ever before, modern life is not having a completely positive effect on health. The increasing amount of time spending staring at computers and mobile phones screens every day is causing an epidemic of dry eyes. The redness and soreness that it causes are some major examples. Those are just some of the modern complaints for which TRB Chemedica International SA, in Switzerland, has the remedy. Its work with hyaluronic acid has allowed the company to develop a series of patented medications, some of them are available over the counter and others must be prescribed by a doctor.



TRB's main production site in Vouvry, in the picturesque Valais region of Switzerland

"Hyaluronic acid (HA) is a biocompatible polymer found naturally in the body, especially in the ocular system, where it plays many important roles," explains Vice President Alessandro di Napoli.

"HA molecules possess extremely beneficial physical and chemical properties such as viscoelasticity

and water retention. By exploiting these properties, we have developed a range of effective medications to not only treat dry eyes, but also some rheumatic and arthritic conditions."

TRB's expertise lies in ophthalmology, neurology and rheumatology



TRB manufactures injectable hyaluronic acid to ease joint pain

areas. All three of those can be described as growth areas. Indeed, modern lifestyles and demographic developments favour a rise of these types of diseases in the future. "The increase in life expectancy means a hike in age-related diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis, Parkinson's disease and dementia," says Dr.

di Napoli. "Currently, treatment options for all of these afflictions are limited but we are working very hard to develop medications that can offer relief, if not a cure."

TRB was founded in 1980 by Dr. di Napoli's father. Over the next ten years, the company grew quickly as the worldwide agent for an Italian drug manufacturer. Between 1989 and 1999, TRB became independent, acquired patented technologies from universities and independent scientists and developed its own products. This period in its history resulted in some of its most successful lines that includes Diacerein; the first and only oral IL-1 inhibitor for use in the treatment of osteoarthritis; Hyaluronic Acid; for intra-articular administration in the treatment of osteoarthritis; Vislube and Vismed lines for typical ocular use as lubricants

in the treatment of eye dryness sensation; Visiol for intra-ocular use during ocular surgery; and GM-1 which is potentially a drug for the treatment of Parkinson's disease. "In the future, we will focus on neurological therapies," says Dr. di Napoli. "The amount of people aged over 65 is set to significantly increase in the coming years. This corresponding rise will result in a large population living with dementia and that will put an enormous strain on health services worldwide."

Although Alzheimer's is often used as a catch-all word for age-related cognitive decline, there are many different forms of dementia and therefore, no one-size-fits-all solution. TRB is committed to continuing its research and developing new products. "We are already active in the high-tech pharmaceutical area and want to develop specific drugs for this set of diseases," says Dr. di Napoli.

However, it is not just age that is increasing morbidity in the population, there are also lifestyle factors. Prolonged screen use coupled with air conditioning and pollution are all fuelling the rise of eye discomfort, while obesity and overweight are lowering the average age of joint problems. Many younger patients are searching for their own remedies for these issues. "Digitalization has transformed the pharmaceutical industry," says Dr. di Napoli. "People are now more likely to Google their symptoms than to go to the doctor. Based on the result of their search, they are tending to seek their own remedy from pharmacists where waiting times are much shorter." This is particularly the case with TRB's ranges of ocular products which are distributed via wholesalers to pharmacies and chemist's shops.

In many of its markets, TRB is the top brand. "We are one of the market leaders in France and



TRB's products are exported to 70 countries worldwide

Germany, while in Argentina and Thailand, we are among the top suppliers of rheumatology medications," says Dr. di Napoli. TRB is active in 70 countries and has 17 sales offices around the world, as well as production sites in Argentina, Brazil and of course Switzerland. Counting 900 employees, the Swiss company has a major presence in its niche. "We want to expand exports as well as develop

new products in our existing areas of specialism," says Dr. di Napoli, whose father is still involved in the family business even at 85 years old. "Patients are the main focus of our efforts which is the reason why we'll continue investing in research and development to find new ways to treat both old and new diseases." ■



'Made in Switzerland' is an important quality seal that sets TRB's products apart and guarantees their efficiency

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