

Scheske's Infirst raises launch funds

COMPANY NEWS OTC

Business Strategy

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Infirst Healthcare has raised £25 million (€30 million) to help launch its cocoa-flavoured OTC cough medicine in Europe and commercialise its pipeline of non-prescription products.

The UK-based company – led by Manfred Scheske, former European president of Glaxo-SmithKline Consumer Healthcare – said the funding from Invesco Asset Management would enable the firm to enter the “US\$20 billion (€16 billion) cough, cold and pain consumer healthcare markets”.

Scheske pointed out that cough, cold and pain were the “largest and most prevalent conditions in the consumer health sector” and represented an “enormous opportunity” for Infirst to bring “innovation and efficacy” to a market which had seen few new products and only “marginal innovation” over the past few decades.

Speaking to *OTC bulletin*, Scheske said the new funding demonstrated the value in Infirst's philosophy of “known drugs – made better”.

OTC companies continued to see switching as the main path to innovation in the OTC sector, Scheske said, but there was significant value

to be found in making established ingredients work harder and better.

This strategic focus would allow Infirst rapidly to develop new products that would be faced with minimal regulatory burdens, Scheske said, but would still produce valuable intellectual property and offer real benefits.

Infirst plans to launch the cocoa-flavoured cough medicine under its own brand name in a “key European market” sometime in 2014.

In this first key market, the product would be based on a combination of diphenhydramine hydrochloride and levomenthol, Scheske pointed out. However, the product's active ingredients could be changed in individual markets to suit the regulatory environment, he added.

US launch handled by Pernix

Outside of Europe, Infirst has licensed the cocoa-flavoured cough liquid to Pernix Therapeutics in the US.

Pernix said that it planned to launch the product under the Dr Cocoa brand name “in time for the 2013/2014 cough and cold season”.

The Dr Cocoa product range would include daytime, nighttime, cough, cold and fever formulations, the US-based firm pointed out.

Turning to other products in Infirst's pipeline, Scheske said the development of a new presentation of ibuprofen was “on schedule”.

The ibuprofen product would not be just another headache product, Scheske noted, but a product focused specifically on inflammation.

A brand name had already been chosen, Scheske said, adding that the product would mostly likely be rolled out in Europe first.

Commenting on how Infirst decided which areas of the OTC market to target, Scheske said that the company had very strict criteria.

There needed to be an unmet need in the category, preferably a symptomatic need, Scheske said, and the company had to be sure its potential product could make a difference.

Asked about potential partnership opportunities, Scheske said that the company was “very open” to deals with big pharmaceutical firms, as well as “horizontal” partnerships with companies similar to itself.

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