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POINT-OF-CARE Professionals

By introducing new technology and increasing awareness, HemoCue is bringing a new level of quality to preventive health care while reducing the global reliance on unnecessary antibiotics.

Images by Richard Slater

Niels Christiansen, CEO of HemoCue, built his career with Siemens, working there for 23 years across various sectors. He spent 18 years in Siemens medical devices and five years in power generation. “Of the 23 years I spent with Siemens, I was always employed by headquarters in Germany, but I spent only about seven years there. The rest of the time was spent on postings in different countries.

“I spent three years in the Middle East, residing in Egypt, more than five years in the United States, five years in the UK, and finally four years in Stockholm, Sweden, which was another parameter in me ending up back in Sweden with a Swedish company, as I am not Swedish myself.”

Having been CEO of HemoCue for six years, Niels has witnessed dwindling numbers in medical investment through various key markets, which has been a challenge and vital opportunity for the team at HemoCue. “There’s been a lot of pressure on medical spend in what we call the advanced markets—the United States and Europe—which represent about 85 per cent of our global market, so it is clear that we have focused a lot on the growth opportunities in what we call high-growth markets, or emerging markets, such as China, India, Brazil, and other parts of Latin America, and Africa.

“Before we saw these trends in Europe and the United States, we started investing a lot in terms of getting more people on the street into high-growth markets. For instance, when I started in the

company in 2008, I think we had one employee outside of Europe and the United States; three or four years later we had about 75 people in these countries in order to increase revenue. Fortunately, that helped compensate at least the last part of the drop we’d seen in the markets in the US and Europe in the recent year and a half.

To offset the losses incurred in developed markets, HemoCue has entered adjacent clinical segments. “Our products are very much focused on diabetes screening as well as anemia screening, and we have expanded into adjacent segments with new products to generate revenue from other existing markets where we weren’t before, to get a growth curb in that way. So the simple summary is—new product into segments where we were not present before, as >



well as investing quite significantly in the so-called emerging markets is very important.

One of the key drivers for HemoCue is to minimise the amount of unnecessary antibiotic prescriptions that are rampant in modern medicine. “The clinical research is quite substantial in indicating that the very frequent use of antibiotics invariably leads to more and more resistant bacteria; bacteria that are no longer eliminated by antibiotics. From that point of view, one should be quite restrictive in using antibiotics, because the more they are being used, the more resistance will be built up over the years. Everybody would like to leave the doctor’s office with hope that they will get better, and very frequently that hope is a prescription for antibiotics, but at the end of the day, they can’t be sure that will actually work unless they really know if the infection is bacterial or viral.

“With our white blood cell count systems, we have one that does a total count, and we have one that does a five-part differential for all five different white blood cells as well as a total count. It gives the physician much more information from the patient within the three or four minutes it takes to perform the test, so they can make a much better judgement as to whether the infection is actually viral or bacterial. By doing this, it would be possible to quite significantly limit the prescription of antibiotics and thereby also limit the risk for bacterial resistance to antibiotics. The big question is: when will the national healthcare schemes of various countries really push hard for this kind of screening to limit the prescription of antibiotics?”

Niels notes that alignment of company vision and staff engagement is only possible through extensive communication. HemoCue has spent a lot of time and effort from the top down to communicate with employees



about their specific purposes and their role in the larger picture. “People, I believe, do not just come to work for the pay cheque. A lot of people today want something more; they want to have an aspiration about making a difference and why do we do what we do.

HemoCue does instrument development for medical devices to help improve the quality of life for patients throughout the world.



“For the majority of the people in our company and probably in the medical industry, this is the higher purpose that motivates them well beyond remuneration and other aspects. I think the shared purpose is very important and we can only achieve it through communication and interaction with employees worldwide. We can always do more, for sure, but we are conscious of it and we believe that it’s very important to make sure that our shared values and the shared purposes are really known and lived also throughout the organisation.”

As part of the Danaher Corporation, HemoCue is driven by a number of core values that are common throughout its parent company. These values look at things like core revenue growth, profit expansion, improvement of quality, promoting from within, talent development and management, and return on investment. These core values are reported on frequently, and the company makes regular plans to see how HemoCue can achieve them. “The other thing is that our parent company Danaher has something called DBS [Danaher Business System] that has been well documented in at least two different issues of *Harvard Business Review* through the years.

“That is basically a toolbox of best practices: how to improve business, both in terms of hard

processes and soft factors in the areas of HR, talent management, and the development of people. The help we get there, I think, is phenomenal. We are a relatively small company, and the companies owned by Danaher vary, but a lot of them are medium-sized companies. So it is almost like getting all these business consultants for free, which is fantastic. If we want to improve in a certain area, very often we can go to the Danaher Business System and look for tools and experts that will help us work on specific topics to improve the company. From that point of view it’s a very beneficial relationship.”

HemoCue is extending its capacities into new areas while expanding into new markets across the globe. By increasing the company’s expertise and footprint, HemoCue is in good stead for the coming years, particularly as the need for preventive health care becomes more prevalent in new regions. “I think the future holds a lot of very good opportunities for HemoCue. We have a very strong technology base. We have used that to become leaders in our current fields of diabetes and anemia screening. We are in the process of using it to make a difference in the area of infection diagnosis to help on the issue of prescription of antibiotics, and we are in the process of moving into other areas as well like HbA1c

testing and lipid panels. I think we have a lot of opportunities to expand our technology into adjacent fields.

“We also have a lot of opportunity to grow, especially in the high-growth markets, where I am sure we will see a continued high GDP growth in many years to come. China may not be satisfied with 8-per-cent growth when they are used to 10 per cent, but 8 per cent is still pretty high for the standards in Europe and United States at the moment. I also think the help of our owner, Danaher, and collaboration with other sister companies within the Danaher conglomerate will provide us with a lot of help that will make our future very bright.”

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