

"For 40 years the pharmaceutical industry has moved through the synthesis of molecules. I am in favor of bringing clinical evidence to ancient medicine"

Procare Health is a pharmaceutical laboratory born in 2012 focused on well-being and women's health. Headquartered in Spain, totally privately owned and with subsidiaries in France and Portugal, it has an innovation model with more than 20 percent of its budget allocated to R&D. Its products are made with therapeutic principles of natural origin and based on clinical evidence. This is how Yann Gaslain, CEO of Procure Health, explains it in an interview with EL MÉDICO magazine.



Illustration 1. Yann Gaslain, CEO of Procure Health

¿Why focus on women's health?

Since the beginning, my vision has focused on women's health, with the aim of responding to a need. In 2012, when we created Procure Health, medical treatments for menopause were based on hormone replacement therapy, which involves the use of estrogen and progesterone to artificially raise hormone levels in blood. For years, studies have been published stating that hormone replacement therapy can cause breast cancer and increase the risk of cardiovascular disease. Given these results, many women did not want to follow this type of treatment, but there were no adequate and developed alternatives. At Procure Health we believed it was time to support and help these women. Our laboratory was born with the idea of innovating, researching, formulating and developing products with natural ingredients based on plant extracts and that had clinical evidence, to respond to the needs of these women.

How do you assess the current situation of the National Health System (NHS)?

As a citizen, my opinion is that we have a health system which works because we have very well trained health professionals, quality health center and a good system of patient care. We can talk about a mixed system, public and private, which is well developed, compared to other nearby countries , such as France, where it is more public than private. In this sense, we can say it is balanced.

Does Procure Health have products funded by the NHS?

Our portfolio includes only two publicly funded osteoporosis products. From my point of view, the financing of medicines is becoming more and more limited. We have recently seen how homeopathy in France has been defunded on the basis of arguments in efficacy, and those that are financed are products of very high innovation, such as biological treatments. Our laboratory does not have the capacity to produce this type of biological drug and that is why we do not support this model.

There are those who think that to stop financing products for minor syndromes in benefit of the great innovations is good, what do you think?

Great innovations bring improvements, but sometimes the contribution is not greater than the one already provided by traditional medicine. In osteoporosis, for example, it is true that the new drugs have contributed something more, but they are also more

expensive and, therefore, some drugs for minor syndromes are no longer financed. In my opinion, what the industry needs to do is to make a commitment to try to cover therapeutic needs where there are no solutions, or to focus on minor syndromes by promoting access to treatments at a better price so that the greatest number of people can benefit.

How do you see the future of the pharmaceutical industry in Spain?

The situation is better than it was, but this does not mean that there are no risks. The pharmaceutical model has recovered thanks to innovation, but, from my point of view, if there is no high-level innovation there are risks. If the patent finishes and the products become generic, the laboratory's business may be seriously affected

In your opinion, what does the pharmaceutical industry contribute to the economic sector and the industrial fabric of our country?

It is fundamental. What happens is that companies, in many cases, due to the need to improve the price, are forced to outsource, that is to say, taking the manufacturing out of the country so that the medicine supports the price and, at the same time, is profitable. We have taken the decision to manufacture here, in Spain, under a different model. We have costs and we offer a quality product, and this is reflected in the price.

Many patients say that medications are expensive, what is your opinion on this?

In our specific case, they could be expensive because the research and manufacture is carried out in Spain. However, our vision is to make treatments accessible to the maximum number of people. The fact that the patient finds a treatment expensive is a lack of opportunity for the person and for the laboratory. Therefore, we spend a lot of time studying how to facilitate access, analyzing the drop in manufacturing prices, studying administration formats and packaging to make them more economical. In France, where most drugs are financed, the claim that drugs are expensive is perhaps more frequent than here. In this sense, I think that co-payment is a good solution to facilitate access, since it allows financing products for minor syndromes, while there is a small contribution from the patient.

What is the role of research in the company you run?

At Procure Health we spend between 15 and 20 percent of our budget on research, a very high percentage for a company like ours. Within another of our areas, the papilloma virus, we are the company that invests the most in Spain. We do it here, because this is where we can have a good quality of research.

What therapeutic areas are addressed by Procure Health?

We are a laboratory specialized in women's health and we are devoted to research and fight against the spread of the human papillomavirus and to address its treatment. A human papillomavirus infection in the cervix can become complicated and cause cancer. Each year in our country, about 2,500 new cases of cervical cancer are diagnosed. Worldwide, 530,000 women will get cervical cancer and 310,000 will die from the disease. In 2016 we decided to offer a solution for the treatment and prevention of lesions caused by the human papillomavirus, launching the Papilocare vaginal gel. We market it in Spain, France, Portugal and Eastern countries. In total, there are 24 countries at the moment. Soon it will be available also in Mexico and Colombia, Russia, and Vietnam. We want to make this solution available to as many women as possible, across borders, because it is an effective treatment that can really help.

What other contributions do you offer in the area of Gynecology?

As a result of the research we did on the human papillomavirus we thought we could provide other solutions such as Idracare or Palomacare. The first one is a gel for moisturizing and relieving the symptoms linked to vaginal dryness. Palomacare, is a moisturizing gel with some ingredients of Idracare, but it is also a repairer of the cervicovaginal mucosa. It is recommended for vaginal dryness and inflammation, vaginitis and cervicitis. In addition to the cervicovaginal area we address female sexual dysfunctions with Libicare. This treatment is the result of our research plan to improve women's sexual health. We found natural ingredients that produce an increase in endogenous free testosterone, increasing sexual interest, lubrication and arousal in sexual relations. We are currently working to make Libicare available beyond our territory.

Do you want to highlight any other therapeutic area where they have presence?

The osteoarticular area (arthrosis and osteoporosis) represents 30 percent of our business. Articular diseases are going to be more and more frequent and currently the most common treatment is opioids and NSAIDs, with the associated health consequences. At Procure Health we have launched Dolocare Flex, a food supplement that helps to maintain healthy and flexible joints, bones and tendons, based on bio-optimized turmeric. It is 1,350 times more assimilable than turmeric powder, since one capsule contains the equivalent of 950 grams of turmeric. It is suitable for people with joint problems, including sportsmen and women.

What differentiates your products from others available in the market?

We offer natural solutions with clinical evidence. Our food supplements are made from proven plant extracts. For 40 years the pharmaceutical industry has been moving through the synthesis of molecules. I advocate for bringing clinical evidence to ancient medicine. From my point of view, there is a field that I support and advocate for, which is the existence of ancestral solutions or traditional medicine, such as plant extracts, to take care of people's health. Not taking advantage of this resource that nature offers us is a loss of opportunity for health. However, always under clinical evidence. From Procure Health what we do is provide clinical evidence to the ancestral medicine. This credibility is what characterizes us as an industry and what we try to transmit from our company to the professionals who prescribe our products.

Can you provide us with some business figures?

This year we will have a turnover between 10 and 12 million euros, with a growth of 50 percent over the previous year. It should be highlighted that in 2018 we have made a significant investment to expand the business outside and that we will make an even greater leap next year. We have drawn up a map of development in Spain, France, Portugal, Eastern Europe and Italy. We want to reach England and Germany, that is, to be present in the most important countries in Europe. As we mentioned before, we want to reach Mexico and Colombia and, why not, Vietnam and China in the future, a market with many possibilities.

How do you see the future?

Beautiful. We want to continue researching and making treatments accessible to as many women as possible, both in Spain and in the rest of the world. Within the field of women's health, we are going to start researching fertility, and we will continue researching against cervical cancer. Precisely in this scenario we have created, together with Harvard Medical School and the University of California in Los Angeles, cervix-on-a-chip. This is a three-dimensional cervix that makes possible to reproduce the functionality of living cells, which interact with each other, and which is used for research into drugs and new therapies. This is helping to predict the effects of the drugs that were already investigated before conducting clinical trials in humans. It has been a very innovative project all over the world, which has generated interest from the scientific community, and which is sure to provide interesting solutions.
