Empowering tomorrow's therapies today

CDMO A specialist for complex biopharmaceuticals, the CDMO Rentschler Biopharma SE has once again reinvented itself: in 2021, the company set up a centre of excellence in the UK for manufacturing of cGMP-compliant viral vectors for gene therapies and more recently, it doubled its global production capacity with a new manufacturing line in the US. European Biotechnology spoke with CEO Benedikt von Braunmühl to explore the developments and future directions of the company.

EuroBiotech_Mr von Braunmühl, what is the strategy behind Rentschler's expansion of its business and management?
von Braunmühl_ As a CDMO, being successful means being ready to evolve with the fast-moving market. In 1983, we were industry pioneers, with the world's first market approval of a native interferon-b (fiblaferon). In 2023, we contributed to nearly 25% of all FDA-approved biologics alone. Our ability to respond to client needs has always been a driving force behind our decisions. The move to the UK was part of our effort to offer advanced therapies, the Stevenage Bioscience Catalyst, being an ideal location to grow in ATMPs and further evolve our business. With our Milford site in the US, we tapped into the country's dynamic innovation landscape whilst moving closer to our clients. We transformed the site near the Boston biotech hub into a cutting-edge multi-product facility for biopharmaceuticals. Along with our expansion, we also evolved our leadership to reflect our new positioning as a global company.

EuroBiotech_How is Rentschler Biopharma positioned as a CDMO and where does it want to go in terms of clients, especially in the US market, and in molecule formats, sites and sales?
von Braunmühl_ We are the experts for complex modalities from concept to market. We currently offer cGMP drug substance production for over 140 therapeutic modalities, more than 50% of which are advanced antibody formats and complex proteins. Our pledge is to find best-fit solutions for our clients' endeavors. With our new state-of-the-art production line in Milford, we have not only doubled our global cGMP capacities but are also strengthening our local presence for years to come, also welcoming new clients.

Benedikt von Braunmühl
Chief Executive Officer of
Rentschler Biopharma SE

EuroBiotech_The CDMO sector is rapidly growing – CAGR 11% by 2030 – and consolidating. Is it sensible for a CDMO of Rentschler's size to continue to develop organically?
von Braunmühl_ Consolidation for large-scale CDMOs will continue. But specialised CDMOs, like Rentschler Biopharma, will likely gain more importance. We add value by manufacturing therapeutics for rare and serious diseases that require substantial experience and expertise. Being free from capital market influences enables us to prioritise sustainable growth and long-term objectives over short-term profits. Moreover, we offer our clients full-service solutions across the biopharmaceutical value chain by building meaningful strategic alliances, like our collaborations with Vetter for fill & finish and Leukocare for formulation.

EuroBiotech_How do you envisage Rentschler's business in five years' time at the existing and possibly new locations? What role will the current growth areas like CGT play – especially in the early phase of clinical development?
von Braunmühl_ Innovation is at the heart of what we do. We don't limit our clients when it comes to exploring new possibilities. We give them space to test their ideas, especially in early phases of development projects. I firmly believe that this is how great results happen. We proved this during the global pandemic, when we rapidly adapted, becoming a manufacturer of about 2.5 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine. By combining the client perspective

Picture: Rentschler Biopharma SE

with technological know-how, we drive innovation. Take CGTs: according to Global Data, about 5,000 CGTs are currently in preclinical phases. Many of which are working with viral vectors as gene ferries. We recently launched our new lentiviral vector manufacturing toolbox which complements our existing adeno-associated viral (AAV) vector services at our UK site.

EuroBiotech_What role do talent recruitment and site coordination play for Rentschler Biopharma?
von Braunmühl_ Today's employers face many challenges. No company has the luxury of attracting talent and retaining them until their retirement. Rentschler is well-positioned, nevertheless, staying attractive for existing and future talent is vital. We actively invest in collaborations with universities and education initiatives, and partner with our peers in research clusters, strengthening the local biopharma regions our sites operate in. We also live by this spirit in our daily work and foster cross-site collaboration.

EuroBiotech_Which strengths of its team, logistics and client relations can Rentschler rely on and where do you see room for improvement?
von Braunmühl_ When I look at the work our employees do across sites, I am deeply impressed. Here are people working across three different countries, with many different nationalities and professional backgrounds. All share one vision: advancing medicine to save lives. Our two bio-pharmaceutical sites, for instance, are closely connected, not only when it comes to seamless technology transfer from Germany to the US, but also on a collaborative level. Our employees work in cross-site teams, regularly visit their counterparts, from production to business development or IT. The same is true for our site in the UK. This directly translates into our client relations: we believe that we achieve the best results when we work together as their partners. They place their trust in us when they commission us. So, their projects are our projects. No client is ever the same and we learn with every project. The smaller ones may require more batches and consulting, while the larger ones are in need of specific processes. A client from the US may face different market challenges than one in Europe.

With a new state-of-the-art manufacturing line in Milford, US, Rentschler Biopharma has recently doubled its global cGMP capacities

EuroBiotech_Cooperation with a CDMO is a matter of trust. In light of the shortage of qualified personnel, how do you address the fields of automation and AI in your services?
von Braunmühl_ Trust is the key. Digitisation and automation play a central role in our short- and long-term strategy to ensure that we remain a reliable partner. Our roadmap is geared towards four areas of management, operations, clients and client business in a holistic strategy. We are in the process of digitising and networking our systems and processes end-to-end, also looking into AI solutions. Deloitte estimates that the adoption of AI in biopharma could reduce manufacturing costs by up to 20% and improve process efficiency by 30%. In the long run, this can translate into more efficient services, freed-up capacity, and increased transparency for clients along the entire value chain. These changes also pave the way for new professions in biopharma, like bio-data engineers or oversight officers, who combine scientific expertise with data know-how.

EuroBiotech_How do you assess the increasing orphanisation of drug indications for your company's business?
von Braunmühl_ Orphan drugs are part of our core business. At the same time, we are on the doorstep of the era of personalised medicine, with increased demand for new modalities, mainly driven by the growing need for new treatments for the rising incidence of cancers and other diseases globally. As modalities become increasingly complex, our expertise positions us well in both production and regulatory consultation. This allows us to effectively pave the path to clinic and market for therapeutic solutions.

EuroBiotech_Your next goals and priorities?
von Braunmühl_ We have worked with clients from across the globe for five decades now. We know what it takes to adapt to local conditions and tailor our approaches. We will continue to build on this experience and are committed to empowering tomorrow's therapies today, addressing unmet medical needs of patients worldwide. ■

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Picture: Rentschler Biopharma SE