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Viartis Welcomes 'Healthy Competition' For UK OTC Erectile Dysfunction Top Spot

by [David Ridley](#)

Viartis' marketing director Rob Elliott speaks to HBW Insight about how the company is investing in flagship OTC erectile dysfunction treatment Viagra Connect to ensure the brand keeps ahead of the growing competition.

Since its creation last year out of a merger between Mylan and Pfizer's Upjohn off-patent and mature brands unit, Viartis has been investing heavily in its flagship OTC erectile dysfunction (ED) brand, Viagra Connect.

Last December, Viartis, in partnership with the Men's Health Forum, sexual health charity Brook and dating expert Sarah Louise Ryan, launched the "Time To Raise It" public relations campaign, which sought to remove the shame and stigma associated with ED and put the joy back into sex.

Then at the beginning of 2021, the company launched a new two-pack trial version of Viagra Connect in UK pharmacies, and also announced that the first-in-category treatment would soon be available without a prescription in neighboring Ireland following a successful Rx-to-OTC switch. (Also see "[Viartis Offers Viagra Connect In Smaller Trial Pack For UK Men](#)" - HBW Insight, 25 Jan, 2021.) (Also see "[Viagra Connect To Launch In Ireland Following Rx-to-OTC Switch](#)" - HBW Insight, 18 Jan, 2021.)

It's no coincidence that this investment comes as other sildenafil (50mg) alternatives flood the market.

In an interview last year, Perrigo UK & Ireland managing director and International vice president, Neil Lister, revealed to HBW insight that the company was launching a white label version of the drug. (Also see "[Perrigo To Launch UK Private-Label Viagra Connect Competitor](#)" - HBW Insight, 17 Feb, 2020.)

Since then, Dr. Reddy's Laboratories and Teva Pharmaceuticals have also launched OTC

sildenafil products, under the Almus and Liberize brand names respectively.

Meanwhile, UK R&D firm Futura Medical is threatening to shake up the market with its drug-free ED treatment gel, MED3000, which now has an EU CE mark and for which the company is currently seeking OTC approval in the US. (Also see "[Futura's Drug-Free Erectile Dysfunction Gel On Track For US And EU Launch](#)" - HBW Insight, 26 Aug, 2021.)

While Viatris is not fazed by these challenges to Viagra Connect's well established position, marketing director Rob Elliott tells HBW Insight that the company must keep investing in the brand to keep its position secure. This will help support Viatris' ambition of becoming a "new champion for global health," he says.

Viatris is also exploring other markets where it can launch Viagra Connect to and looking at how its other OTC brands such as Diffiam and Endwarts can be made more accessible to pharmacy and consumers, Elliott reveals.

Q Has COVID-19 increased pressure on sexual dysfunction and/or exacerbated related mental health problems?

A Several studies have been conducted to look at how the pandemic has affected our sex lives, including one by Rhonda Balzarini, a social psychologist and assistant professor at Texas State University. Focusing on participants from 57 countries, her research found that, over the course of the pandemic, people reported increased stressors, including loneliness, general stress and COVID-19-specific worries, they also reported decreased sexual desire for their partners. As well as decreasing our libido, these daily stressors can inhibit the ability to get an erection. Unfortunately, it's a vicious circle as erection problems (EPs) if left unaddressed can have a negative impact on men's self-esteem, which in turn can have a big impact on mental health, causing depression and anxiety.

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What's more, over the course of the pandemic, the opportunity to go on dates and have sex have been limited to say the least! So, it's not surprising that a recent survey we conducted showed that over a third of men were feeling anxious about returning to "normal" this year once restrictions had lifted and the expectations that brings when it comes to sex and dating. This number was even higher when looking at men that experience EPs, with half agreeing that they feel under pressure to perform well in bed. Just as with mental health, simply talking openly about EPs – with a partner, friend, or healthcare professional – can help to relieve the burden that so many men and their partners feel.

Q How is Viatris capitalizing on e-commerce and digital with Viagra Connect to help men address EPs?

A E-commerce is a valuable and useful channel for us. EPs are often something people can be embarrassed to talk about, so e-commerce offers a discreet solution that allows people to access the help they need through our pharmacy partners and through our own online platform. Our online partner provides a seamless, one-stop-shop ordering process, with fast and discreet shipping and packaging. We also want to help educate people suffering with EPs via our online platform, by providing answers to any unanswered questions they might have. Aside from e-commerce, we're continuing to leverage multiple digital channels in order to build our brand distinctiveness at scale, drive education and consideration, and ensure we successfully deliver the Viagra Connect message to those out there suffering from EPs. This includes digital out-of-home adverts, video, social media, Google display advertising, video-on-demand and TV.

Q How is Viatris planning to maintain its position as market leader in the EP category?

A Viagra Connect launched as the first and original OTC EP treatment and, since then, we've created and built the EP OTC category. We welcome healthy competition as a means to providing greater consumer choice, however, we want to ensure the category keeps growing to ensure more patients are getting access to the treatment they need. That's why we continue to invest heavily in the brand and the category as a whole.

Q **Viartis is continuing to widen access to Viagra Connect across Europe, with the firm recently securing the Rx-to-OTC switch of the product in Ireland. Where's next for OTC Viagra?**

A Viartis sees itself as a new champion for global health, with enhanced global scale and an operating platform with expanded commercial capabilities and reach. Part of our mission of empowering people worldwide to live healthier at every stage of life is continuing to help the millions of EP sufferers across the globe, and to that end we are continuing in our efforts to talk with a number of health authorities globally. Providing access to high quality trusted medicine regardless of geography or circumstance is a key pillar of our healthcare transformation mission as in Viartis we see healthcare not as it is but as it should be.

Q **Is Viartis investing behind any of its other major OTC brands, such as CB12, Diffiam and Endwarts, with new launches or marketing campaigns in the UK?**

A The Viartis UK OTC portfolio has high-quality trusted medicines, and we will be leveraging our expertise to ensure our products and services are accessible to pharmacy and consumers alike.