# Mohamed Ezz Eldin – Head, Novartis Gulf



***Our focus at Novartis Gulf is clear, we aim to transform the standard of care for twice as many patients, twice as fast***

04.08.2023

Tags: UAE, Novartis, GCC, MENA, MEA, Strategy, Digital, Partnerships, Access

*Mohamed Ezz Eldin oversees Novartis operations in the UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman and Qatar. He outlines how the company's strategy has evolved in the Gulf region following the spin-off of generics arm Sandoz and its now 100 percent focus on innovative medicines. Ezz Eldin also describes some of the key digital initiatives that Novartis is engaging in across the Gulf, as well as the continuing importance of public-private partnerships with state actors to drive and shape the future of healthcare in the region.*



**What is the main focus of Novartis in the Gulf region today, especially after the spinoff of Sandoz from your operations?**

Despite the constant progress in R&D across the pharmaceutical industry worldwide, there are still areas of significant unmet medical need, and our goal is to find solutions for them. We are bringing cutting-edge treatment options within our focus therapeutic areas of cardiovascular, immunology, neuroscience, solid tumour, haematology and cell and gene therapy.

Our focus at Novartis Gulf (UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman and Qatar) is clear, we aim to transform the standard of care for twice as many patients, twice as fast. The whole organization is focused on bringing innovation faster to more patients, and to do this we are engaging and partnering with health authorities and key stakeholders across Gulf countries to accelerate new product launches and subsequently enable patients in Gulf to gain early access to innovative medications/ treatments. For example, in the UAE, through leveraging the favourable regulations from the Ministry of Health and Prevention (MOHAP) that support innovation through fast-track regulatory pathways, patients are nowadays gaining access to innovative medicines at the same time as their counterparts in the US and Europe, in some cases even ahead.

2022 was a year of transformation for the company as we went through a transition with the complete separation from our generics division, Sandoz. We are now fully focused on innovative medicines, while Sandoz will continue to focus on generics. We believe that with this spin-off, both companies will be able to perform better through independent growth strategies.

**What is the significance of the Gulf region for Novartis?**

The Gulf region is strategically significant for Novartis due to the remarkable appetite to embrace innovation and maximize investment in healthcare services & infrastructure. A clear example is the UAE, which has positioned itself as an innovation hub on both regional and global levels, and subsequently a priority country for new launches of innovative medicines/ treatments.

There is also a high interest in private-public partnerships in the markets and governments are putting in place advanced regulatory frameworks to accelerate access to innovation and provide sustainability so that patients can continue to receive state-of-the-art treatments in the long term. This makes the region an attractive destination for innovative pharmaceutical companies such as Novartis.

**What role does private insurance have in the UAE?**

Since the UAE government has mandated insurance coverage for all residents, private insurance is playing a large role in the UAE. We are constantly in discussions with payers to ensure quick and sustainable patient access to innovative treatments.

**How is Novartis performing throughout the region?**

As a company, we have transitioned smoothly into the transforming for growth business model and are constantly looking for ways to evolve our operations and become more efficient. Based on market data from IQVIA we are the number 1 innovative medicines company in Gulf, therefore I would say we are a top player in the healthcare sector in the region. We are proud of that and have a very solid track record in bringing innovative medicines and advanced treatment platforms to the region to ensure that our innovative medicines reach the right patients in need at the right time.

**You mentioned earlier the growing trend of private-public partnerships. What examples do you have in which Novartis is taking part in such activities?**

In recent years, there has been an increased interest in public-private partnerships in the region, and the health authorities encourage multinational companies to play a bigger role in shaping the future of healthcare and driving forward faster market access to innovative therapies in a sustainable manner.

To give a recent example of this, Novartis partnered with the Emirates Oncology Society and the Friends of Cancer Society to increase awareness and empower and educate women on early detection by early screening for breast cancer.

Similarly, we have a partnership with the Emirates Cardiology Society on a program called The Heart Can’t Wait. It is focused on heart failure and the need for early diagnosis which will result in better patient outcomes and improved quality of life for patients.

Last year we signed an agreement with the Department of Health in Abu Dhabi on a new population health model with the focus being cardiovascular disease and specifically Atherosclerotic Cardiovascular Disease (ASCVD). This model aims to build awareness and find the best ways for intervention at the right time to improve patient outcomes. This should have a positive impact through creating cost effective methods of treatments, which in turn will broaden the access to therapies for a larger group of patients.

**Clinical trials are important for any healthcare ecosystem looking to bring innovation to patients more quickly and attract investment. How well-equipped is the UAE for clinical research operations?**

Research and development are a main focus area for pharmaceutical companies where a significant percentage of earnings is poured back into developing the product pipeline to fuel innovation. This is critical to meet unmet needs and lower the disease burden for patients, which in turn will have a positive impact on society and the economy.

For a country to attract more R&D investments in areas like clinical trials, it is important to have a supporting regulatory framework to encourage private sector involvement. The UAE is attracting experts to the country by having the right infrastructure in place, collaborating with universities and institutes, and setting up clinical trial centres which will strengthen its position as a CT centre in the region.

**Digitalisation is growing in importance, are there any digital initiatives that you are bringing to the UAE?**

Digitalisation in all industries including the pharmaceutical industry has progressed beyond being a trend into a fact that is here to stay, and this is very much aligned with the UAE’s vision to assert its position as an innovation hub. Examples of digitalization in the Healthcare industry range from drug discovery, awareness, early detection, and follow-ups to patient support programs.

In Novartis, we realised early on that digitalisation is playing an increasing role in shaping the future of healthcare, therefore, Novartis is leading the way by partnering with major Tech companies across the world to bring these concepts to healthcare.

We are leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) to increase patient access, improve customer experience, drive automation, and provide predictive analytics. The use of AI is being explored across many areas to improve processes in clinical development, manufacturing, and supply chain.

In the business services area, Novartis uses AI to ensure efficiencies and effectiveness in driving operational excellence. In collaboration with Microsoft, the AI Innovation Lab was created to enhance our AI capabilities as an organization, from research to commercialization, to accelerate drug discovery and development of transformative medicines for patients worldwide.

In addition to what we are doing globally, there's a lot that we are doing in the UAE. For example, we have collaborated with the Department of Health Abu Dhabi to improve the overall patient experience and model of care in cardiovascular disease by enhancing Abu Dhabi's digital healthcare ecosystem.

Another example is our partnership with Aster DM Healthcare on digital transformation and clinical research, which will provide Aster access to our advanced therapy platforms and data science to improve patient outcomes.

Also, we have launched InNovaHeart in collaboration with EchoNous. It is the first AI-assisted handheld portable ultrasound device that helps reduce the time to diagnosis of heart failure.

**What are your objectives over the next two years?**

We will continue to build on the strong partnerships that we have established with the health authorities and institutions and work hand in hand to maximize patient outcomes using science and digital technology in an end-to-end healthcare journey starting from patient screening, diagnosis, treatment and ultimately leading to better and longer lives for patients in the region.

**See more interviews**