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Amin Al Amiri, Assistant undersecretary for Medical Practice and Licensee of Ministry of Health, UAE, discusses why the UAE, despite turmoil in the rest of the Middle East region, continues to be a destination for the pharmaceutical industry, how MOH plans on supporting standardization across the region, and how recruiting local talent is an important factor in the success of any company, small or big.



The UAE has become a regional hub for the pharmaceutical industry, as 90 percent of the companies have started their original offices here. This has lead to innovation, improved access to new medicines, the construction of new hospitals, and an overall restructuring the healthcare system. What is your vision and strategy in terms of the next steps to further encourage investments in the pharmaceutical industry to improve medical practice here in the UAE?

Over the past three to four years, we have started very comprehensively to attract foreign investments in the field of pharmaceutical industry and medical practice. As well, we recently signed a MOU between both governments, signed by His Highness, Minister of Foreign Affairs here in the Emirates, and by his correspondent from Portugal. This MOU aims at involving both governments in attracting Portuguese investments here in terms of health professionals, doctors, nurses, but also the Portuguese pharmaceutical companies. There are already a few Portuguese companies registered here in the Emirates and some of the companies have started acting like a local agent. Also, several companies are planning to have factories here.

We proceeded similarly with the German government; we started by signing a MOU between both sides and to bring in some of the Hamburg companies. We organized one of the biggest conferences, under the patronage of his Excellency, our Minister of Health, with the presence of the Minister of Health in Hamburg and the former Minister of Health form the Kingdom of Bahrain, also a lot of VIPs, and almost 400 doctors from Hamburg of different specialisations. This conference was held at the Dubai Health Care City in April 2013 and currently there is a process of supporting those companies from Hamburg to come and invest here.

Furthermore, I had a meeting with the Korean government and we presented the lecture at one of the biggest medical conferences called Baikuria held in January 2013. There we started to attract Korean companies to register their medicines here in UAE, which has already happened.

On the other hand, we have 5 big pharmaceutical factories in the pipeline, one of which will be one of the biggest factories to produce capsules for medicines, a project for which we managed to connect foreign investors with Emirati investors. The MOU is already signed and soon this factory will be on the ground here in Dubai. Also, we have many other factories which will be built in the near future, meaning that we were able to support foreign investors and connect them with Emirati investors by helping them as the Ministry of Health in terms of regulation and the documentation necessary for establishing their factories as a fast track.

These are some of the examples showing that the United Arab Emirates is the best country in the Middle East for companies to invest and have regional offices here. On the plus side, we have great support from our leadership, our Federal President and the Prime Minister, who are always supportive and keen to implement new regulation aimed at attracting new investors.

Another example is that we introduced the new specifications and guidelines for the medical stores and those guidelines were consulted with the existing international pharmaceutical companies and pharmaceutical local factories, and also with the medical stores, almost 400 stores responsible for exporting and importing medicines and products. Those guidelines were again improved by their suggestions and their comments and it has been released as a Ministry decree. As such, we always go to the field and consult the people, as we consider them as strategic partners and we look always to have their feedback because, at the end of the day, the outcome of the Ministry will suit everyone and will be accepted by all because it has been a work or outcome of everyone’s effort and input.

What role are you playing in bringing the region closer to improvements in standardization across the region?

The Emirates are different than all Arab countries; we have a good harmonization with the GSS countries and also with other Arab countries. But the UAE has a different situation, our business opportunities are unique, the system of governmental procedure and regulations implemented here in the Emirates are completely different, we do everything as a fast-track process, we support foreign investment and we consider them as a strategic partner, we do not have difficulties in regulations, everything can be done online, and we have high transparency in our work.

Currently we have a new initiative to reduce the price of more products, although we did already have previously existing initiatives. In March 2011 we reduced the price for 560 products and in November 2011 for 150 products. This was done voluntarily with the support of the pharmaceutical companies, as per their wishes, their request, without putting any kind of pressure. This initiative was announced by their Presidents and I thank all the pharmacies companies which supported this initiative and also the Pharma Group which was very supportive of this initiative.

This is a good indication of how far the UAE is leading the pharmaceutical industry and a proof that we are different from the others, we are unique. We have a big harmonization with other countries, but we are considering Emirates as a unique, different country and soon we will have new ideas to announce that we are considering now.

What are the next steps to build local talent here?

In fact, the next step is to start the activity of the Emirati Board. Last week we received the decree from the Ministries Cabinet to prove the establishment of the Emirati Board that will be under the leadership of the Emirates University. This was the outcome of the work between the Emirates University, Ministry of Health, Dubai Authority, Abu Dhabi Health Authority and Dubai Health Care City. I think that with the presence of this Board we will support the health professionals here in the Emirates and we will support the Emirati nationals to be more involved in the medical field.

The UAE has the best environment for investments, faster registration and full support from the government in terms of pharmaceutical investment. What incentives do you have for setting up manufactories here?

We have eight existing factories that produce almost 962 products, generic medicines, and, as I said, by the end of this year we will be having innovative medicines also. Some of the incentives we provide to these companies are the free zone areas, where they have full access to the free zone based at the airports, the best track procedures in importing and exporting, the best track registration by the Minister of Health for their products and also the fast track in the process of the GMP certification and inspection by the Ministry of Health, registering their products. We also help them in finding Emirati investors to join them. Regarding the free zone areas, we provide them with many facilities, which are really unique. Furthermore, the government has investments also in pharmaceutical factories. Global Farma is one good example, and there are some others to be built soon.

In terms of turning the UAE into a research and development hub, how do you plan to compete with other R&D hubs around the world such as Singapore or South Korea, or even with the European hubs?

We started to sign a MOU with the Dubai Otek—the same MOU will support R&D in the Emirates between the Dubai Otek and Ministry of Health. Actually, I have been there four times and I met the foreign companies invited by them to find the possibilities to establish R&D facilities here in the Emirates and already some of those companies have started in Dubai Otek. I think that by providing best facilities it will attract more companies to have their R&D programs here, either

pharmaceutical or other type of medical companies. And the regulation implemented in Emirates also supports heavily the establishment of R&D programs.

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