Ferring Algeria, M. El Hadi Benamar, General Manager



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The country manager of a research-driven, specialty biopharmaceutical group offering treatments for infertility outlines his firm's approach for the socially conservative Algerian market.

Your promotion as general manager of Ferring Algeria is quite recent. Can you tell us what were your priorities during the first year and how do you evaluate your progress to date?

Since my promotion in November 2013, I supported a company as it underwent restructuring. This was a real challenge because it was a small subsidiary of a dozen people. Ferring is a company well represented internationally, with 50 subsidiaries worldwide in 90 countries around the world, and is still expecting to grow. Given the importance of Algeria, the company wanted to give an impetus to the rapid transformation of the Algerian subsidiary, with more investments, especially in human resources, to ensure proper development. We have implemented a new liaison office. It was a challenge to recruit, find the right people and to set up a transformed structure but we will now be able to expand from this basis.

hHow do you assess human resources in the pharmaceutical field in Algeria?

Over the last 10 years, pharmaceutical skills have started to emerge in the country, including through the establishment of multinationals, which brought training efforts, and we see a first informal "cycle" achieved. There is still work to do in this area, which will also be done with new forms of management by young managers. Indeed, having an MBA does not guarantee being a

good manager: there is also and above all the knowledge of the field that matters, that these young people bring with them, thus completing the experience of the multinational.

What is Ferring’s strategy to attract talent?

Ferring is booming in Algeria since the company global policy to make investments in emerging markets where the country market is fairly representative. Ferring wants to create a dynamic representative of the company here in Algeria, in the same way it has done in the United States for example. This is the first role of human resources. At first, what attracts people is the philosophy of Ferring, “people come first,” based on respect, good cooperation, and personal development. Compared to other larger multinationals, Ferring is only just starting up in Algeria, so there is a whole building to do, and people are largely attracted by the fact of being part of this construction. At Ferring, the management is close to people, with much more interaction and more opportunities coming in line with new products, and this is what attracts people here.

Can you tell us about the activities of Ferring Algeria so far?

Ferring’s presence in Algeria is not yet well-known. Its development is focused around gynecology, urology, obstetrics and gynecology, pediatrics, endocrinology, which is a department that is starting in the same way as gastroenterology. Ferring develops its products by activation of “treatment areas”, and brings each new product according to the “area”. Moreover, we are currently recording innovative products, still in these therapeutic areas, in the same way we brought them in Europe and the United States. These are products that could greatly help doctors and patients, and that are not yet offered by other firms here.

What is the strategic importance of the Algerian office to the company’s regional and global operations?

The company, like other pharmaceutical company, realized that emerging markets were very demanding; especially the Algerian market with its large growth rate of 12 percent per year. This is what it is seen by Ferring, which is willing to follow the same direction and evolution as the market. It has been a long time since there was no investment here, so there is a lot to be grown. Hence the desire for a little more aggressive development, with investments and later, truly important projects to sustain our presence in the Algerian market.

One of Ferring’s specialty areas is fertility. Here in Algeria, a conservative country, these are sensitive issues. How does the company adapt its sales approach or its products to the country cultural and social norms?

The field of fertility is actually a difficult area, culturally speaking. People do not open so easily to approaches we propose. However, this market has been growing for two years: there are many private clinics that have opened and do a lot in this direction. The demand is there: in two years, the number of fertility clinics has increased enormously. There are more than 14 centers in the country, and more are coming. The magnitude of change will be positive over the next three or four years. Ferring is a relatively large company with resources; we support clinics and doctors by providing training that we have developed in other countries. We train professionals, and expose them to fertility protocols that have been developed through medical consensus around the world. In the future, we hope to do this in partnership with the ministry of health, and open a medical program for youth.

Some of the services you provide are mainly for women, for example obstetric gynecology. How is it perceived, do you do some "education" to patients that you can touch?

It must be understood that we are not in direct contact with patients. We work with associations and so on on these issues, to also bear doctors who themselves do not have the time to educate their clients. We are talking to opinion leaders to develop educational work nearby. Obstetric gynecology and fertility are new medicine specialties compared to diabetes or gastrointestinal cases, for which protocols are there, as well as patient education.

We communicate a lot about the new medicine in the world, through our representatives, "focus groups" and symposiums. We also invite our doctors to our conferences abroad. Doctors also often require assistance to develop their communication skills, to organize their information research for specific medical questions, or on organization of clinical trials, with help of our statisticians for example.

Ferring has set up manufacturing facilities in emerging countries, in Mexico, China, India. What should be changed in Algeria for Ferring to consider capital investments and research in the future?

For the moment, we are a liaison office; our presence is very young, nothing comparable with other firms. But we want to expand with all the necessary extent. Ferring has to invest heavily in the country, through manufacturing sites. We are governed by the law 49/51, and the company wishes, like all others, to attract more investment facilities and entry. However, for the moment, we are just about submitting authorization files of our products.

What are the top selling products in the territory, and what are innovations you will introduce in the market in the future?

Among our large sales, we have a product for enuresis (i.e. children who are “bedwetting”). We also offer a product for fertility, which is very innovative because it is one of the few products which have a dual association. We also have, in the more mature gastrology market, products that work well. We would like to go from five products today to 20 in the coming years. Mainly, we want to go to the endocrinology market, where there is a huge shortage in Algeria.

Regarding the distribution challenge, we work with several distributors, most of them are well established, and some problems which occur most often are related to a lack of outlets in a particular region, or access to patients. But the CHIFA map facilitates things, since patients are able to supply themselves. The south of the country is sometimes less well connected, but our importers still provide us a fairly wide coverage.

In your opinion, what is the potential of Algeria as a regional leader in the pharmaceutical industry?

The authorities really have confidence in that sense, and are aware of the issue, they make every effort to make it happen. However, we will really have to help all players, especially in training, because we will require adequate and qualified human resources. We will have to learn from Singapore’s experience and inspiration, identify potential pitfalls, and so on. We have the experience with us, that we can observe, analyze and perhaps repeat here in Algeria. The will is there and the direction is clear. As per the 2020 target, if we want to reach it, we have to put resources and support people who need to develop their skills, train them, send them to Europe or the United States.

Our expansion is in line with the will of the political and the Ministry of Health. Ferring will certainly benefit the international network to our local office, its experts from the United States or elsewhere.

What are your personal goals and aspirations with regard to the development of Ferring Algeria office in the coming years?

We want Ferring to become the leader of fertility in the country, because we have an international reach. We wish to develop in this country the image and dimension we have elsewhere, for example by being more present in training cycles. We also want to develop different therapeutic areas in which Ferring is trying to activate his efforts, in gastrology, bedwetting, and so on, and

give a real dynamic presence in the country. In the future we would like to be able to manage the Maghreb market from Algeria, through key management positions by region and departments, in terms of a culture which is essentially the same.

Algeria has much to offer, a lot of development to do in this therapeutic market that can be dominant and grow rapidly, as soon as we have access. There is a real reason to invest in this market which is promising both for Algeria and for Ferring.

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