Siphal (International Exhibition of Pharmaceutical and Non-Pharmaceutical Chemist’s Products in Algeria) – Yacine Louber, Pharmacist Director

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The director of Algeria’s only pharmaceutical fair speaks out about how he came to set up the event and how the local industry has evolved over time.

Where did the idea for Siphal come from, and what challenges have you had to address?

I went to pharmacology school in Algeria, and passed in 2002. I had started other projects, outside the pharmaceutical field, but during a visit to the “pharmagora” fair in Paris, I came to ask myself: What about we set up a pharmacy fair in Algeria? It did not exist. There were, actually, exhibitions dedicated to other medical areas, but nothing specific to the pharmacy sector. The idea to create Siphal grew from there.

First, we had to meet with potential exhibitors. As a pharmacist, I was given the opportunity to meet with the laboratories and to introduce my project. Many of them were interested in the concept, and this is how we “set the wheels in motion”. The first exhibition took place in January 2008.

We were very well received then. We had 50 exhibitors, which is great for a first time, and above all we had a lot of visitors, to an unexpected level: about 5,000, attracted by novelty and an

effective marketing plan.

The first show covered only half of today's surface, around 2,000m^2. Each year, more laboratories get interested in this event and join us.

During the show, partnerships are forged, as the laboratories often tell us. For instance, during the last Siphal show, a Tunisian laboratory found a distribution partner in Algeria.

It is also an exchange space between dispensary pharmacists and laboratories.

The exhibition is specifically designed for pharmacist visitors. Conferences, on top of laboratories symposiums, are designed for them, for instance.

How do you communicate about this event?

Regarding companies, our database, which includes almost every pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical company, along with herbal medicine and childcare businesses, serves as a base. We work by emailing, or by appointment with myself or one of our two salesmen. Since a few years back, several companies now contact us, willing to participate in Siphal, even before we communicate about the next instance.

We air radio spots one month before the event. However, we do not use print media advertising channels for budgetary reasons, although newspapers usually mention the exhibition dates some time before it starts, to inform their readers.

Now the government wants 70 percent of national drug consumption to be covered by domestic production. Do you think this is feasible?

Of course! Not only is it feasible, but also necessary. With the support of generics, this will happen. A lot of pharmaceutics operators have buckled down to it, they will succeed, bottom line being there is mutual support to those ends.

We still lack production. It is true that some importers are not interested in manufacturing, but the government has enforced laws that extensively push them towards domestic production, for instance when prohibiting importation on drugs that are already produced locally. This law did much for reaching 38 percent coverage of current national needs. It forces the importer into manufacturing. There are already 1,000 products prohibited for import, and many laboratories started up in recent years, despite our bureaucracy.

However, it seems to me that manufacturers must find a way to get along and limit the number of players on each molecule, etc. This will be hard, let it be clear, because many will do what is easiest: it is still business, and they make products that sell.

How do you think the “Made In Algeria” brand is perceived by the Algerian patient?

The patient follows what the doctor prescribed. For a variety of reasons, age, social status, etc., when the pharmacist tries to provide him with generics, the patient refuses, even with the best explanation aside. This is true with Algeria, as it also is elsewhere.

Therefore, I think that patients have no issue with “Made in Algeria,” but when the originator of a generic exists, then they favour it, by principle to get the parent compound. The only leverage left thereafter is that of repayment rate, which aligns with the generic reference one.

What is your message to the international community about Algeria’s potential in the pharmaceutical field, and about the show in particular?

I invite them to come and visit the show. This will be a great opportunity to meet with many players of pharmaceutics in Algeria. Like in many other fields, Algeria has got a great potential in the pharmaceutical area, despite some bureaucratic hindrance that can only get better.

Our exhibition welcomes everyone, even though 80% of our exhibitors are Algerian. Last year, we had a small number only of international contributors. Our outlook, our ambition is that one day, the show be organized around “pavilions” for each country and region of the world, France, China, India… and Algeria of course! Every developed country in this field is interested in the Algerian market.

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