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Janssen's vision for the GCC is to make a greater impact on the healthcare systems by bringing new and innovative medicines to patients

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Vishnu Kalra, Janssen's managing director for the GCC region, reflects on his 18-year career with Johnson & Johnson, including his perspective on the success factors behind the company's strong growth in the region. Moreover, he highlights Janssen's diversified portfolio across different therapeutic areas, with neuroscience, oncology, haematology, pulmonary arterial hypertension and immunology leading the way.

Can you outline why Dubai is a critical location for Janssen in the Middle East and what your main objectives have been since starting the role in 2017?

Not only for Janssen but across Johnson and Johnson (J&J), Dubai is a hub for the Middle East and is a critical location for multiple reasons. The first is its direct access to almost any destination in the world with direct flights. Secondly, there is an amazing diversity of people and access to talent; Dubai is a fantastic place to attract people, due to it being a gateway not only to the GCC but the MEA region as well.

One of our focuses as a team has been on areas of high differentiation and high unmet clinical need, high burden of disease and complex therapeutic areas where patients don't receive the right diagnosis on time or are not identified at all. Janssen's vision for the GCC is to make a greater impact on the healthcare systems by bringing new and innovative medicines to patients.

Secondly, the GCC is fantastic for establishing an ecosystem where innovation can be accelerated for patients. The GCC is unique in comparison to other markets due to the speed at which we can bring innovation to patients. These are two of the most important tenants for an innovative pharmaceutical company. Therefore, we wanted to align our key markets in the GCC to follow the same cadence as new global product launches. Furthermore, we were looking to partner closely with healthcare authorities to understand how we can accelerate getting these innovations faster to patients.

Saudi Arabia, UAE and Kuwait have accelerated regulatory pathways. Due to these mechanisms, we are often able to launch in a shorter time period following approval from the European Medicines Association (EMA) or United States Food and Drug Administration (US FDA). Currently, we have a portfolio that is highly aligned with our global portfolio, and in many cases, some GCC markets, such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia, are also the first to make medicines available to HCPs and patients. Moreover, for Janssen, the UAE is amongst the top two to three countries globally in terms of access to many products.

What is the importance of the GCC for Janssen's wider EMEA operations?

The GCC is a highly innovative region with an eco-system that accelerates innovation to patients.

The GCC region is one of the few regions in the world where products once approved by FDA or EMA are able to be launched. The GCC is a go-to market for building and gaining launch expertise especially in highly focused therapeutic areas that can be different in focus to ones found in the rest of EMEA.

Europe has a far more oncology indexed portfolio given the burden of disease is related to the older age profile as opposed to the GCC where the median age is 29. Therefore, in the GCC, the disease profile is expressed differently, for example, disease areas such as Schizophrenia and Immunology where the disease tends to happen in younger patients, thus our portfolio mix is different, and the portfolio indexation is also more distinct as well.

Janssen is currently bringing clinical trials to the region which has never happened before. This is truly transformational in terms of being a highly innovative company and looking at what we are bringing to the region in terms of building capability in clinical trials and ensuring unique insights from the region are captured. The GCC is amongst the largest clusters in emerging markets and is contributing greatly to the emerging markets growth as we bring innovative medicines to more

patients in the region. In addition to the above, the GCC region is a source of top talent to our EMEA and global regions.

You mentioned Janssen is focused on areas such as schizophrenia and psychiatry in the GCC, can you tell us more about the area of mental health in terms of initiatives and programs Janssen is pushing to increase awareness for the population?

The area of mental health demonstrates an immense challenge and hence an immense responsibility for Janssen, therefore, the opportunity to make a difference is incredible. Most diseases, especially mental health, have a great deal of stigma attached to them. Thus, the greatest challenge for Janssen is operating in an environment where mental health generates a high level of stigma. We are looking to raise awareness for these diseases by ensuring that caregivers, parents, teachers, friends, and family are looking out for certain symptoms to ensure patients are being exposed to the appropriate level of diagnosis and treatment. Mental health is a challenge for all emerging markets, however, there is a growing awareness on the part of governments, as they begin to understand that there can be no health without mental health.

Ultimately our most critical task is to partner with key stakeholders across all the GCC markets. It is not only about having access to medication, but infrastructure needs to be in place as well including well-trained medical practitioners and ensuring patients are diagnosed early and stay on treatment.

From Janssens’s perspective, we spend time training and partnering not only with doctors but also nurses to strengthen relevant capabilities. Moreover, we provide support services, whereby nurses can visit patients in their homes. Therefore, we have created a host of services centred around mental health which allows us to serve this enormous burden of disease.

Additionally, we continue to partner with healthcare systems and have a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the UAE regarding mental health.

What products are you bringing specifically for mental health?

The GCC is a world leader when it comes to anti-psychotic medication and Janssen is leading the way with long-acting injectables in the region. For example, in schizophrenia, there are oral antipsychotics, the first generation long-acting injectables, and next-generation long-acting

injectables.

Furthermore, Janssen is involved in some exemplary work around depression, and are currently working to bring the first novel treatment in over 30 years for depression.

Many pharmaceutical companies have set up their commercial operations in the UAE, furthermore, industrial strategy 2030 has been set up to focus on a knowledge-based, sustainable and innovation-focused business ecosystem. What do you think is next for the UAE?

From the UAE's perspective, they are not looking to compete in primary care, they are far more interested in competing in areas of high-technology and high innovation and we believe this is the next stage for them. Janssen is already in talks with key stakeholders in Abu Dhabi to understand how some of the more innovative technologies in J&J globally (still under development) can be brought to the UAE for funding or even local clinical trials.

Whilst the UAE is a go-to place in the region from a funding and infrastructure perspective, innovation can be further be accelerated with investments in academia that will build a stronger eco-system for sustained development.

Can you tell us more about any digital solutions you are looking to bring to the market?

Across the board, not only for Janssen but J&J as well, there are a host of digital solutions, from educating patients and doctors to helping us better understand the performance of our drugs and products. When we talk about digital solutions, we mean mobile solutions. For example, we recently hosted a conference on pulmonary arterial hypertension which is a very niche therapeutic area. We had around 250 doctors come from all over the region (Middle East and Africa), and this conference was recorded live providing the option for people to not only watch remotely but also participate through asking questions through their phones.

What drives you personally to wake up every day and continue working to better the lives of patients with Janssen?

Having been with J&J for 18 years, it has been a blessing to be a part of a company where values are a priority, driven by our Credo. I personally have had the opportunity to witness the impact of

our life-changing therapies on the lives of patients. It is incredibly motivating to work for an organization committed to change the trajectory of human health.

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