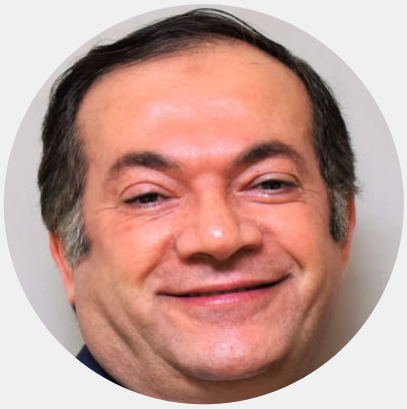
Ashraf Allam – Regional VP Middle East, Turkey & Africa, Mundipharma



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Mundipharma, through its model of independent associated companies, is aiming to take the lead in the Middle East, Turkey & Africa markets through its continuous commitment to improving peoples' lives. Ashraf Allam, regional VP for the META region, discusses his journey of building Mundipharma's strong footprint in the region and the opportunities that market with more than one billion potential patients has to offer. Allam also explains why this part of the world is an excellent platform to market Mundipharma's innovative treatments, and possibly license many more novel therapies in the future.

Mundipharma presents itself as a particular company, being not only a multinational company but also a global network of independent companies, which allows each member company to adapt its strategy to the local reality. How different do you believe is the Mundipharma META region from the Mundipharma we meet elsewhere?

The region overseen by our office covers the Middle East, Turkey, and Africa (META), and it was the last piece of Mundipharma’s globalization. In 2012, the company began to expand its reach across emerging markets, and at the beginning of 2014, opened the office in Dubai. Mundipharma operates in a unique way because while it is a multinational company, it operates under the notion of independent associated companies, meaning that each legal entity has independence in terms

of operation; we have necessary autonomy to tailor our strategies based on the local dynamics of the markets we are operating in. Our strategy in the META region was to grow the business into three different pillars: firstly, registering and launching products wholly owned by Mundipharma; secondly, licensing products from other companies, which has been one of the critical drivers of our growth because our licensing model is not based on having only a distribution agreement but rather a full licensing where we own the marketing authorization; and thirdly, the geographical expansion because in the past, the company did not have any presence beyond the standard distribution agreement model in the region. We had to transform the operating model from distribution to a full presence model.

The META region is very diverse, and to be able effectively and efficiently manage 50 plus markets, we have decided to divide it into five clusters:
Egypt, Near East, Central, and Northwest Africa; GCC, Iran, and Pakistan; South Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa; Saudi Arabia, a standalone affiliate as well as Turkey. The Dubai office oversees the operations in all the clusters, which means providing guidance and counselling on compliance, legal, human resources, corporate affairs, finance, supply chain, marketing, and medical affairs.

Can you give us an overview of the company's footprint in the region and of the importance of the META to the group, both in terms of sales and growth?

The META region is an essential market for any organization as more than one billion people are living there.

In terms of performance, we are aligned with Mundipharma's overarching vision of diversifying the business to continue reaching as many patients as possible. The size of the patient pool in this market is massive, and specific diseases for each country are a common concern. The META region has been an excellent platform for launching innovative treatments. that Mundipharma has to offer. Of which, some had already been launched in other parts of the world.

We have built our excellent team and tailored a unique portfolio of innovative products to be able to address the unmet medical needs of patients across the region. This might sound counterintuitive, but it has been our formula for success. We have built a substantial brand equity and industry position for Mundipharma that has significant enterprise value for the shareholders.

Talking about people, what attracts talent to Mundipharma in the META region?

Competing with titans of the industry for talent is a serious challenge. At the end of the day, people do not just join companies; they often join and leave other people. My principle has been hiring high-profile, successful leaders who become magnets attracting similar individuals. The employees are the key to success, and to help them reach their full potential, we offer a creative and dynamic work environment where they will have not only occasions to learn but also unprecedented opportunities to make things happen. The people are what makes an organization sustainable, and what I mean is all we stand for, our beliefs, and our values. It took a lot to build a dedicated team of exceptional people, and I hope to retain high-performing talents and to continue the successful journey, constantly improving peoples' lives.

It is no secret that because of the opioid epidemic in the US, the company is undergoing turbulent times, how exposed are you to this risk here?

Mundipharma actively works to ensure that its medicines are marketed responsibly, and in accordance with the regulatory frameworks in each country it operates in. Mundipharma prides itself on being an ethical company and continues to work closely with regulators, and within strict regulatory constraints, to address the unmet need of patients across the META region.

We have a strong and world-class compliance program that is strictly implemented in our region, and we always follow not just a letter of low but also its spirit.

While the region you head represents a potential market of over 1b patients, and has been branded as the fastest growing for the group. Within the company portfolio which are the key therapeutic areas you believe will be driving its growth?

Our approach to different therapeutic areas revolves around commitment. Ophthalmology is the best example. We had the opportunity to acquire the glaucoma portfolio from MSD and built a robust platform of different ophthalmology products creating an eye care company within our company. Another example is Betadine, our flagship brand, of which initially only limited formulations were available in the market. We have in-licensed several OTC products in the consumer health space under the umbrella of the Betadine® brand and built a strong portfolio of different consumer range products.

What is the message you convey to the board regarding the potential of the META region?

Despite its many challenges, there is tremendous growth potential in the META region and needs to be accompanied with a long-term approach. Companies that want to succeed must find a way to adapt in order to run a successful business.

When we last spoke to you back in 2013, you mentioned that the UAE could be a strategic center and springboard from which companies could export to neighbouring markets in the region. How has the UAE's role evolved, and what is the best way to use it as a hub?

The UAE pharmaceutical market will reach almost 4 billion dollars, according to the latest report by IQVIA. It is a significant market, particularly when you consider investing in manufacturing for exporting to other markets within the region. I must say that due to complex regulations in different countries exporting might be challenging for some of the local generic companies. They might need to consider this before trying to export to Africa and other Middle East markets. Perhaps entering into a local partnership could be one of the solutions to get around it.

You have mentioned in the past that your objective is to make Mundipharma a top ten company in the region. What is your strategy to achieve that goal?

I still have that aspiration. I like to run successful companies, and there are several ways to measure that. One of them is my high-performing and ambitious team, which I am privileged to lead. Their tremendous and continuous contribution to the success of the company is incontestable. Their every day, hard work and commitment allow Mundipharma to make a difference in a patients' life, which is the main reason why we have been in this business.

What is your personal motivation to continue working in this industry?

I really love my job, and I am very passionate about maintaining patients' hope for a better-quality life. I feel responsible for improving the well-being of the communities we serve in, and this includes our employees and their families. This was one of my most essential motivations when I started my career in the pharma industry many years ago, and it's continuing to be now at

Mundipharma.

About Mundipharma

Mundipharma and its network of privately owned Independent Associated Companies (IACs) is dedicated to alleviating human suffering and improving quality of life for the human race. The Mundipharma story, spanning over six decades brings together a visionary approach and a pioneering spirit – what is best told through its patients, employees and the communities across six continents in which they serve. Mundipharma is focused on business transformation by leveraging global leadership in pain and, through a shared spirit of innovation, building a growing presence in antisepsis, respiratory, oncology, consumer healthcare and other specialty areas.

For more details please visit: www.mundipharma.ae

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