Ayman Mokhtar – General Manager GCC, Iraq & Iran, Upjohn, a Pfizer Division

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Ayman Mokhtar is the general manager (GM) of GCC, Iraq and Iran for Upjohn, a Pfizer division. He spoke to us about his professional journey and Upjohn's efforts to establish strategic public-private partnerships with actors including the Ministry of Health and Prevention (MoHAP) for a Centre of Excellence for Real World Evidence & Insight Analytics in the UAE, as well as with Emirates Airlines and New York University of Abu Dhabi.

As the GM for Upjohn (a division of Pfizer) for GCC, Iran and Iraq, what are the strategic initiatives that this new worldwide division is undertaking to establish itself as an essential healthcare partner for non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in the region?

Inspired by the heritage of a company known for its pioneering science, Upjohn is a Pfizer division with trusted and proven therapies in the areas of cardiovascular diseases, pain, urology, psychiatry, and other non-communicable diseases (NCDs). As you may know, NCDs continue to be the leading cause of death and disability worldwide, representing 71 percent of global mortality. Moreover, in emerging markets, NCDs contribute to a staggering 85 percent of deaths of those between ages 30 and 69 years.[1]

This is a call for action and Pfizer has recognized that the time has come for us to direct our focus onto NCDs, which is where Upjohn comes into the equation. We want to play a more prevalent role

in policy shaping and helping nations address the significant burden of NCDs, particularly in the UAE and the Gulf, where there is a significant problem with mortality related to cardiovascular diseases. This is a key area of focus for the UAE as highlighted in UAE National Health Agenda 2021, which states the aim of reducing the cardiovascular mortality rate by 25 percent.[2]

This entails the need for broader access to quality and affordable health solutions. Upjohn's mission is to partner with health authorities and stakeholders across the world to help relieve the burden of NCDs.

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Can you introduce yourself, your background, and your extensive experience as a pharmaceutical executive?

I've always known that I wanted to help people, and the pharmaceutical industry was a way for me to accomplish this goal. As a pharmaceutical professional, my ambition is to go beyond being just a provider but also be a valuable partner and advisor. My inherent belief is that patients should be provided with the right knowledge before the right medical treatment.

I began my career in Egypt, working in pharmaceutical companies and eventually moved to Sanofi where I spent 15 years building my career, during which I demonstrated the ability to develop and grow organizations and manage transitions and acquisitions within extremely challenging and changing political scenarios until I took over as GM of Gulf Countries for Sanofi.

Subsequently, I joined Pfizer in 2016 as a strategy lead for the region, which allowed me to oversee both Africa and Middle East strategy with a focus on Sub-Saharan Africa. In this role, I worked with various partners, including McKinsey & Company to figure out the true potential of Sub-Saharan Africa and travel to countries such as Kenya to understand the African nation and the health needs unique to the region.

One year into my role as strategy lead for the region, I was asked to take over as country manager for Pfizer in the Gulf. Two years later, I became the GM of GCC, Iran, and Iraq for Upjohn, a Pfizer division. Having been in this role for one year, I have seen a transformation moving from the typical global enterprise to a more entrepreneurial mindset; working for an easily attainable

purpose as decision-making has been liberalized to a greater extent, whilst still maintaining Pfizer's legacy.

This has been incredibly beneficial, enabling me to develop a strong network with key stakeholders and sit on several advisory boards, which is moving us from simply being a provider to a partner and now a key advisor. There has been a complete development in the way that we work, often resulting in these organizations coming to us for advisory and consulting services.

Why do you think a lot of multinational companies choose Dubai as a hub for their regional operations?

It is indeed a strong sign of confidence in the UAE and its long-term vision. Dubai is number 11 globally for ease of doing business;[3] moreover, it offers a transparent, predictable and innovation-driven environment that makes it an attractive regional hub for the healthcare industry.

What is Upjohn doing to support better diagnosis and treatment of NCDs across the GCC region?

Overcoming the challenge of NCDs is a collective effort that needs the collaboration of all parties across the healthcare sector (regulators, payers, healthcare professionals, insurance companies, and patients).

At Upjohn, we bring innovative approaches and programs that will drive positive outcomes for people living with NCDs. An example of this innovative approach is the "Keep on Beating" campaign that we started in partnership with the Ministry of Health and Prevention in the UAE. It is a multi-element campaign on the risks of cardiovascular disease that includes free screening for blood cholesterol and sugar levels and blood pressure, public awareness and touchpoints, such as the campaign's website www.keeponbeating.com, as well as an interactive vending machine that instead of taking money requires users to undertake an activity and accomplish a certain level of exercise which would determine the free snack to be dispensed according to the calories burnt.

Another example is the launch of "Health Matters with Dr. Adam", a multifaceted patient education campaign that consists of animated videos designed to increase health literacy and public awareness about the global health threat posed by NCDs made in collaboration with Emirates Airlines and the Ministry of Health and Prevention in the UAE. The videos are developed as a

friendly animated cartoon that provides medical messages and education to the whole family in a very interactive and smooth way and are currently being aired on *ice*, Emirates' in-flight entertainment system. We are very happy to see the outcome of this partnership and we are counting on leveraging it for a worldwide expanded reach.

The visit of Upjohn Global President of R&D and Medical earlier this year has reinforced your company's commitment to the UAE – tell us more about this visit.

Upjohn applauds the UAE's commitment to fostering regulations that advance research in health and executing innovative partnerships. Dr. Amrit Ray, Upjohn Global President of R&D and Medical, has visited the UAE twice in the last year to explore collaborations within the UAE, which includes meeting with the Minister of Health and Prevention and the Minister of State for Science and Technology. These meetings materialized into two partnerships for Upjohn: the first is the establishment of a Centre of Excellence for Real World Evidence & Insight Analytics.

Another innovative partnership was developed with NYU Abu Dhabi (NYUAD), and a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed to support research into NCDs in the UAE. This includes supporting NYUAD's UAE Healthy Future Study (UAEHFS) which addresses the burden, trends and outcomes of NCDs in UAE. The study aims to understand and provide substantive insights into the genetic and lifestyle determinants of NCDs among UAE nationals, and how to prevent these diseases in the future.

What is your future vision for new partnerships and rejuvenating the portfolio over the next five years?

Upjohn's vision is to provide better health to all people. We do that by fostering partnerships that bring solutions to the world most challenging diseases to treat – such as NCDs. Within the next five years, we would like to be the partner of choice, bringing quality and valuable holistic health solutions that optimize the way NCDs are treated and diagnosed across the region. We have started our journey in this direction, and we look forward to seeing the several partnerships we have launched bring meaningful information that could optimize and improve the journey of people living with NCDs.

As you have a diverse portfolio of countries and portfolio under your supervision, what personally motivates you to keep striving for success?

It is about the strong personal connection and passion I have to the work I do. As mentioned earlier, I developed a passion for the pharmaceutical industry while studying pharmacy at university and then I found myself evolving in the pharmaceutical industry with great passion and motivation that kept growing with time. This is due to the value I can bring to the people around me – the ones I work with and the patients whom we serve.

Whether by launching new innovative medications for patients who didn't have a treatment choice or were not optimally treated or by making sure trusted and proven medicines reach patients at the right place and right time– we are touching people's lives in a positive way. We understand this when we hear patient stories or feel the impact of good medication on the health of our loved ones. This is what keeps me striving for success – the ability to continuously make life better for people around me!

I have experienced this personally in my previous capacity as Gulf country manager for Pfizer (we did not have Upjohn at this point). The Ministry of Health and Prevention's efforts to fast track registration in the country and the milestone of registering medicines in UAE in some cases immediately following Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval are incredible. Back then, we worked with the Ministry to bring an antibiotic for the treatment of patients with multiple drug resistance. Having explained how incredible this product was, we were able to register it in the UAE as the first country in the Middle East. Three months later, my mother was diagnosed with a respiratory issue and she was admitted to hospital in Egypt; however, within one month she developed multiple drug resistance. Sending her this medicine from UAE helped her to live for another six months. This is what I dream of accomplishing every day for patients all over the world who do not have access to essential and lifesaving medicines.

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