Ashraf Daoud – General Manager, AbbVie Saudi Arabia



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Ashraf Daoud, General Manager for AbbVie in Saudi Arabia, highlights how the affiliate has harnessed Allergan's portfolio to become a top five company in the market with the objective of becoming the biopharma leader by 2022. In addition, Daoud discusses the impact that an internal Saudization strategy has had, the role of NUPCO as a centralised health care procurement buddy, and AbbVie's initiatives to include more women in leadership positions.

What is the current scope of your responsibilities as general manager for AbbVie in Saudi Arabia and what have been some of your major achievements in the position?

I am currently the General Manager for AbbVie Saudi Arabia and also hold the position of Chairman of RPCC (Research base Pharmaceutical Companies) – representing the pharma Association in Saudi Arabia, leading the association's Intellectual Property Committee. I have almost 30 years of experience in the pharmaceutical industry, building and developing my skills through multiple geographies including Egypt, Saudi, Levant and Singapore where I experienced being the commercial director for Asia, Africa, Australia, and Middle East. My journey brought me back to the Middle East, working as general manager for Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Yemen.

One of my main achievements while leading AbbVie Saudi Arabia has been obtaining recognition as the top pharmaceutical company to work for in Saudi Arabia by Great Place to Work for the 7th consecutive year. The affiliate has also been recognized as a role model because of our Saudization

strategy; we have worked to build the foundation for a successful organization in the future, working with universities and students to develop talent at an early stage.

I am proud to say that the affiliate has achieved a great market position and is today one of the fastest-growing multinational pharma companies in the Kingdom. The team has made a great effort to double our growth and we now rank number five among multinationals, in part because of the successful integration of Allergan.

Some of your colleagues in Saudi Arabia have talked about a big transformation in the country over the past few years after the Kingdom decided to go all in on the diversification of its economy. How do you assess those changes?

It was very impactful to observe firsthand Saudi Arabia's transformation after coming back to the country; Saudi has been working persistently to achieve Saudi's vision of diversifying the economy.

It is not easy for an oil-dependent country to take on this huge challenge, and we are working together as an industry to genuinely support the country in reaching a new era through its Vision 2030. The industry is maturing, we can take advantage of its world-class healthcare infrastructure to bring more important projects such as clinical trials to have significant value for the health of the Saudi population and economy.

Needless to highlight the vital position of securing the investment and increasing the attractiveness for the investors and innovation through augmenting the predictability and sustainability of these investments. For example, providing full protection to IP (Intellectual Properties) rights, regulatory data protection rights, as well the global best practice pricing guidelines to boost the attraction of innovative medicine, and recognize its value for the Saudi health system and patients to create more value-based methodology.

One of the key components of the country's new vision for the industry is a Saudization strategy. How is the pharma industry perceived by talents living in the country?

I am convinced that the pharma industry enjoys a great reputation in Saudi Arabia, particularly with the role of the industry to fight the pandemic. People here appreciate the fact that we bring advanced therapies that allow them to get treated locally, removing the need to travel abroad to receive the best treatments available; the pharma industry is touching each individual and home.

Our industry is a cornerstone of Saudi Vision because we are making big investments in talent development alongside the public sector to ensure that we raise the bar across the governmental sector. We are also working with the public sector to include more Saudi nationals in leadership positions and women in our teams.

AbbVie is playing a major role in influencing the local Saudi talents and inspiring them to join the private pharmaceutical sector, highlighting its importance towards the Government's localization goals. This has been seen through a rise in the percentage of Saudi Nationals across various functions in the pharmaceutical industry. AbbVie's on-going efforts in this area is supporting the Kingdom's goals to upskill current and aspiring Saudi pharmacists, as outlined in the Saudi Vision 2030.

Additionally, inspiring females to work in various fields across the pharmaceutical sector is a top priority at AbbVie, and we are seeing this bear fruit following a high increase in female employment during the past year.

You mentioned that part of your good performance in the market was due to the integration of Allergan. Can you elaborate on the impact of the Allergan integration both in strategy and operations for the Saudi affiliate?

AbbVie is a global, research-based biopharmaceutical company committed to discovering, developing, and delivering innovative new medicines for people. Today, our medicines are helping more than 52 million people living in more than 175 countries, and we are making significant advancements with a robust pipeline of potential new medicines, so we can change lives for people all over the globe and in Saudi Arabia through the vigorous access to the patients.

The Allergan integration has potential impact of this combination for patients and healthcare providers, enhances our ability to invest in promising and innovative science over the long-term in several areas of medical unmet need. And immediately diversifies our business and expands our global scale and growth potential with leadership positions across several therapeutic areas: Immunology, Hematologic Oncology, Neuroscience, Eyecare and Allergan Aesthetics.

Where our new launches and rich pipelines will broaden our portfolio of market leading medicines for the treatment of the world's most complex and serious diseases.

Our overall strategy is to become the biopharma leader in Saudi Arabia by 2022 and the Allergan business will help us get there, making a remarkable impact on people lives.

How has market access in Saudi changed and what are the pricing discussions you are having around innovation, especially on the biopharma side?

Our approach as RPCC representing 21 multinational pharmaceutical companies in Saudi Arabia to the Saudi authorities is highlighting the importance and value of innovative medicine to the Saudi patients and economy and provide our patients with healthier lives.

We are building a great partnership with all the governmental agencies to ensure that we have the best platform to introduce and access the most innovative and advanced therapies to the best of Saudi patients.

We have had a series of workshops with the Saudi authorities, for the most critical strategic topics like value and pricing strategy, HTA (Health Technology Assessment), and IP (Intellectual Properties) rights, aiming to have the global best practice to Saudi Arabia, to encourage and attract more investment to Saudi through fast-track registration and access to the patients for unique innovative medications.

There is great progress for registering the unique innovative products reaching to months instead of years and we are determined to put more effort to have faster access to the patients.

At AbbVie, we are fortunate to have a diverse portfolio and a dedicated team of professionals to ensure that our innovative products are available to patients. After all, having these essential, innovative therapies is not enough without faster access to patients.

What is your take on the role that NUPCO will play as a centralized health care procurement company?

The role of NUPCO is significantly increasing to best supply chain practice across all governmental sectors in Saudi Arabia.

There is a noteworthy need for best management of the innovative medicine supply and access to the patients, to ensure availability and fast access to varieties of these new innovative medicines same time to its global presence.

The process of registration, value pricing, HTA, market access and procurement is still a work-in-progress and needs more efforts to be simplified to the best of Saudi patients.

What are the trends that you see materializing in 2021 and beyond considering the impact of the pandemic?

On one hand, the economy of the Kingdom is thriving but there is an ocean of untapped potential that we need to explore alongside the government. The growth of the Saudi market seems very promising, even after COVID; it will be encouraging and interesting for investors. The country will play a major role in defining new standards of predictability and sustainability to attract more investment in the sector.

AbbVie is playing a leading role in the market going forward, and we have demonstrated our capacity and willingness to do it with our rich pipelines of unique innovative medicines for the treatment of the most complex and serious diseases. And with our Saudization strategy, and we are also looking forward to implementing a global initiative called EED&I (Equity, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion),. We are particularly investing in initiatives to include more women in the workplace and leadership positions; the affiliate has launched another initiative called WLA (Women Leaders in Action) to ensure that we have KPIs to keep track of our progress in that area.

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