Mohammed Al-Tawil – Regional Managing Director & Head of Human Pharma META, Boehringer Ingelheim



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Boehringer Ingelheim's Regional Managing Director and Head of Human Pharma in the Middle East, Turkey, and Africa ('META') Mohammed Al-Tawil reflects on more than two decades of his career with the organization. Underlining the benefits of being a family-owned company, Tawil explains why Boehringer Ingelheim continues to invest in META, how the company managed to achieve 25.8 percent growth in Saudi Arabia in 2020, and why its portfolio in stroke, cardiovascular diseases, metabolic diseases, and pulmonary fibrosis meets the requirements of patients in the region.

Having been with Boehringer Ingelheim for 26 years, what has motivated you to remain with the company for such a long period?

My long tenure with Boehringer Ingelheim is merely a reflection of the company's people-centric culture, which played a key role in my decision to continue to grow my career within the company. With altruism at its core, Boehringer Ingelheim understands that its success is powered by its people at every level of the organization. While most businesses may make similar claims, we stand out because of our commitment to fostering diverse and collaborative environments that prioritize people's growth and well-being. The company is not merely focused on the bottom line – although this is important – but rather its people and the support we can provide to patients, communities, and healthcare professionals.

Talent development has always been a key focus for the company, and I have personally benefitted from it by receiving the support and guidance I have needed to enhance my capabilities and grow at every stage of my career.

During my 26-year tenure with Boehringer Ingelheim, I have had the privilege of working in many META countries, and in UAE with a regional responsibility for the META region, as well as at our Corporate Headquarters in Germany where I supported Boehringer Ingelheim's growth into China and Latin America markets. My time at our Corporate Headquarters helped me better understand the corporate global trends in our industry as well as the nuances of emerging, albeit remarkably large markets such as China, Mexico, and Brazil.

Being exposed to a multitude of practices and cultures has allowed me to see the advantages that a truly multicultural corporate environment brings to the workforce. This stands me in good stead for my current role overseeing the vast and diverse META region, where a one-size-fits-all approach would be ineffective to say the least.

How does the fact that Boehringer Ingelheim is the only family-owned company in the global pharma Top 20 impact the company's strategy, particularly in the META region?

At Boehringer Ingelheim, improving human and animal health is at the heart of what we do. Our passion stems from believing in the value of our work beyond the bottom line. As a long-standing, successful, family-owned organization, we plan in generations, work together across geographies and do so with integrity. Aiming to make significant contributions to healthcare, we specialize in unmet medical needs by focusing on diseases that have not been satisfactorily treated.

Being a family-owned business enables the company to adapt to changing market conditions faster and facilitates swift decision-making in the best interest of the patients in both the short- and long-term. This distinct advantage is complemented by a dynamic and agile organizational structure that enables us to respond quicker to the needs of patients.

Drawing on over 115 years of providing breakthrough healthcare solutions, our focus is on long-term performance rather than being overly concerned about short-term profits. We are successful because we excel in innovation and deliver the highest quality. Looking ahead, we aspire to grow above benchmark, enabling us to remain as independent champions of human and animal healthcare. While we strive to achieve our objectives primarily by organic growth, we also seek partnerships and alliances for success.

Wherever we are active, we feel responsible for our communities and are respectful of our resources. Our goals include building on our successes by increasing the scope of our social and environmental ambitions, and constantly questioning what more we can do to contribute to a sustainable world and a healthier future. Sustainability is embedded in our Leitbild, which is German for Mission Statement, and at the core of our values and the business.

One of our key focus areas is our Access to Healthcare initiatives that encompass an integrated approach towards addressing the four key barriers to access to healthcare: availability, affordability, awareness, and adherence. By integrating sustainability into our core business and functions, we leverage our strength in human and animal health to make a significant contribution to the wellbeing of vulnerable communities.

Economies that develop in a sustainable manner create greater value to humans and societies as a whole. We bring the distinct advantage of being a purpose-driven, family-owned company with strong values that plans for generations ahead. By continuing to focus on the unmet medical needs of vulnerable communities, partnering with organizations that share our values and vision, and engaging our employees throughout the process, we aim to build a robust and sustainable business for the generations to come.

What is the logic of Boehringer Ingelheim's META country grouping and how is the company structured in terms of commercial presence and manufacturing capabilities across the region?

Business organisations usually group markets into clusters and regions taking into consideration geopolitical, socio-economic, and cultural factors, as well as geographic proximities. All these allow us to leverage the synergies between markets, consolidate resources, and facilitate shared learning and easier access to our markets. Our organizational structure in each country is defined by specific market needs and opportunities, the local regulatory environment, reimbursement models, availability of local talent with the relevant experience and expertise, and ease of doing business.

Boehringer Ingelheim had a promising 2020 with a rise in global revenues of 5.6 percent and a significant growth in parts of the region you manage. How would you describe the business impact of 2020 on the META region?

In 2020, Boehringer Ingelheim META achieved a growth rate of 11.6 percent compared with the previous year and was the third fastest-growing pharmaceutical multinational among the region's top 25 corporations with a growth rate of 23 percent in the human pharma market.

Of course, the pandemic presented several challenges. The immediate effect of the crisis on travel and transport required our teams to demonstrate agility to manage supply chain challenges, maintain network visibility, determine alternate supply sources and manage capacity, to protect our patients and ensure an uninterrupted supply of much needed medications.

We were prepared to mitigate disruptions in work practices and interactions with our key stakeholders, as our digital infrastructure was well-established prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and allowed us to swiftly respond to market needs through our digital tools especially when face-to-face interactions became difficult or even impossible at times.

Further, our leadership pivoted from a centralized decision-making process to a decentralized approach, empowering country, and regional managers to ensure the safety of employees, availability of medicines, and sustainability of the organization.

Despite the challenges and barriers caused by the pandemic, the needs of patients with chronic conditions always remained our priority. By continuing to focus on our goal to serve humankind by improving human and animal health, we were able to minimize the impact to the business.

Saudi Arabia is the region's largest market and is estimated to grow from around USD 8.5 billion in 2019 to almost USD 10.4 billion by 2024. Moreover, it is a market included in many reference-based pricings systems. What is your strategic perspective on the Saudi market?

Saudi Arabia is one of the most important and strategic markets in the region. The Kingdom is clearly committed to bettering the health of its citizens by continually improving its healthcare infrastructure and services, and striving for regional and global excellence. The country's brilliant response to tackling the COVID-19 pandemic from the outset has been a model example as they set a benchmark for prioritizing citizen and resident wellbeing. The nation also has a robust healthcare system, strong infrastructure, and displays tremendous potential as it continues to undergo one of the biggest healthcare transformations.

With a strong presence in the Kingdom, Boehringer Ingelheim has unlocked the potential that Saudi Arabia brings to the pharmaceutical and wider healthcare sectors. In 2020, while the human

pharmaceuticals market grew by 5.2 percent, Boehringer Ingelheim’s portfolio in Saudi Arabia grew by 25.8 percent.

We also expanded our legal and commercial entity in Riyadh and, over the past few years, we have progressively aligned our business objectives with those of the Saudi Vision 2030, which aims to grow and diversify the economy and increase employment opportunities for its citizens.

The key elements in this alignment have been driving targeted investments to promote local manufacturing through partnerships with contract manufacturing organisations, as well as to bring the latest and most innovative medications to the community. We also integrated more national talents in our workforce, with a particular focus on women in leadership roles.

We continue to make considerable investments in Saudi Arabia to support the Kingdom’s vision and build the healthcare infrastructure as well as to provide cutting-edge treatments to Saudi citizens and residents. We also support and drive an effective and rapid pharmaceutical knowledge transfer. We collaborate with the Ministry of Health and other healthcare entities to establish care units for specific disease areas, and work to elevate the level of scientific awareness, education, and trainings for the medical community in critical disease areas.

What are the advantages of increasing Boehringer Ingelheim’s Saudi footprint, especially given that the country is located beside the UAE, often perceived as a more attractive destination for international talent?

As part of Saudi Vision 2030, the Kingdom has made great strides in enhancing the business environment and empowering the private sector as well as launched several initiatives to increase investment in the country. To-date, our investments in Saudi Arabia are one of the highest in the region, and these include the expansion of our presence in Riyadh. We continue to promote local manufacturing and boosting the Saudization of our workforce.

In 2013, we partnered with contract manufacturing organizations to conduct secondary packaging. Our plan is to expand our local initiatives to cover primary packaging as well as local manufacturing by 2023.

Over the past two years, we have ramped up recruitment drives, introducing 40 new roles for Saudi nationals, and designed talent development programs for Saudi talent interested in pursuing a career in pharma. During the same period, 67 percent of managerial roles were appointed to Saudi nationals recruited from outside the organization. As of 2021, we have 61 percent Saudi nationals

in our workforce.

In Saudi Arabia, we are also working with the relevant authorities, including the Ministry of Economy and the Saudi Food and Drug Authority (SFDA) to expand local production initiatives as well as expedite approval processes for treatments to accelerate access to much needed medical solutions.

Boehringer Ingelheim is increasingly placing emphasis on being a healthcare pharma company that offers solutions for holistic patient care. How is that reflected in your organization?

We have widened the scope of our operations in certain areas to pursue a more holistic approach with specific conditions that have a huge impact on communities. One major health concern is stroke – the second leading cause of death in the world and is increasingly becoming a major health concern in the Middle East and North Africa, with estimates indicating that stroke-related fatalities will nearly double by 2030 from now.

Our ‘Angels’ initiative was developed and rolled-out globally in partnership with the World Stroke Organization (WSO) to help address this challenge. The mission of Angels is to equip hospitals with the right tools to become ‘stroke-ready’ so that patients who have suffered an acute cerebrovascular accident can be treated as quickly and effectively as possible.

The initiative brings together doctors, nurses, and ambulance crew, helps build acute stroke networks, optimizes diagnosis and treatment, and implements best practices. With this unique healthcare development initiative, multidisciplinary stroke teams around the world can access education, standardization tools, consultancy, community, and quality monitoring processes for implementation in their own countries. This enables them to act faster and with greater integration to minimize the burden of stroke on patients’ lives.

The Angels initiative in the Middle East has been successful. Since its inception, we have assisted several major hospitals in the region to become Certified Stroke Centers accredited by the WSO. We also deploy public communications campaigns to strengthen awareness of the symptoms of strokes and help the public act swiftly and with the right interventions to minimize adverse effects.

Boehringer Ingelheim was recently voted one of the ‘Best Places to Work in Africa’ and has received several similar awards in the region. How do you the describe the approach that has led you there?

Best Places To Work is an ‘Employer of Choice’ certification that recognizes leading workplaces in many countries around the world. It employs a rigorous assessment methodology and a framework that reflects the very latest in workplace trends, focusing on eight workplace factors: leadership, HR and people policies, compensation, benefits, teamwork and relationships, employee engagement, workplace and procedures, and corporate social responsibility (CSR).

In 2021, Boehringer Ingelheim was ranked as one of the top 15 best companies to work for in Africa. Based on the assessment of over 500 organizations operating across the continent, the program’s findings demonstrated how well businesses across Africa have adapted to the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our leadership, inclusive culture, commitment to professional development, agility and sense of community were identified as key reasons that its employees feel proud to work for us. In Saudi Arabia, we also received the recognition of being the top employer; we are very proud of having our operations acknowledged through such prestigious accolades.

The success of a company relies on the accomplishments of its people and we remain committed to supporting our teams on their journey to greater achievement by providing them with an environment conducive to their continued growth. Our employees are our greatest asset and we nurture a culture where our team members feel supported, motivated, and can deliver the best they can. We will continue to build upon the values that have earned us these honors to ensure Boehringer Ingelheim remains one of the best companies to work for in Africa – and indeed in any country and region where we operate.

Ultimately, we understand that to be successful as a company you need to have the right environment. You need to empower and value your team, and you need to have the right processes in place. At Boehringer Ingelheim, we are powered by our people, driven by results, and we grow together.

Is there a final message you would like to convey to stakeholders in Saudi Arabia?

We remain committed to invest in the Kingdom, support its nationalization drive, and welcome the opportunity to exchange and transfer knowledge for the betterment of the healthcare

infrastructure and to provide excellent and prompt medical service for its citizens and residents. Our goal is to be a partner in the remarkable transformation that the Saudi healthcare sector witnesses today and continue to focus on enhancing the standards of care delivered to the community.

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