Mohammed El Ansari – Country Director Saudi Arabia, Medtronic



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Medtronic's country director for Saudi Arabia, Mohammed El Ansari, comments on the implications of the company's decision to move to a direct presence in the Kingdom, positioning the affiliate as a career launchpad for local talent, the local manufacturing of ventilators, and why Medtronic considers Saudi Arabia a priority market.

While Saudi Arabia is not new to you, having worked in the market with Medtronic in the past, this is your first country head role. How challenging has the transition been for you professionally?

My new assignment is a continuation of several previous roles. I was part of the leadership team in the Gulf region focusing on a specific set of therapies. My role now is to drive and grow Medtronic's presence and portfolio in Saudi Arabia.

The challenge is not adapting to the role, but rather driving success within our new business model as a unified customer-focused team, as opposed to managing multiple stand-alone businesses.

As far as talent and staffing teams, many companies have had to adapt to Saudization requirements while coping with a fast-growing market. How are you approaching these

two aspects?

Medtronic was proactive in addressing Saudization by developing programs to attract young Saudi talents over the past three years. We have been able to retain close to 100 percent of our new hires, which has helped us stay ahead of the curve. We are excited at the prospect of having a new generation of talent who are passionate, and we were also able to integrate many of our distributors' talent who also understand the local healthcare sector, our organization, and our portfolio. At Medtronic we are always looking at ways to create an inclusive and diverse workplace, which is why we have adapted our processes in order to recruit the right talent that fits our culture. I am pleased to say that I have inherited a truly great team.

Medtronic Saudi Arabia has transformed its business model by assembling the best team available and offering them the opportunity to develop their careers. Moving to a direct presence has its challenges, but as the market grows and regional hubs open, the demand for local talent will increase. Recently, Medtronic was voted as one of the best places to work for the third year in a row by Tope Employer and was recognized as a Great Place To Work, highlighting the success of our efforts. Our programs and flexibility have created a sense of belonging, while our focus on enrichment has empowered our people to be the best that they can be.

Has the change of the business model and the internal culture translated into excellent performance?

Medtronic has been doing a fantastic job on that front. I started working with the company in Saudi Arabia in 2005 and have seen firsthand how our business has grown and evolved. Of course, some businesses are experiencing more gradual growth, but we have a solid market share across most therapies. There were some challenges along the way, for example recently during the drop in oil prices, and of course during and post the COVID-19 pandemic. However, despite this, we have been able to maintain a strong market share, allowing us to continue investing in Saudi. When I joined Medtronic in 2005, we were less than 80 people covering the entire region and today our workforce is around 400 in Saudi alone.

How relevant is Saudi Arabia for Medtronic within the region and how has the company's model evolved?

Saudi Arabia is a key market for Medtronic, especially in the region, given the high level of technology adoption, innovation, and heavy investment in healthcare. The country has a very rigorous purchasing system that has enabled us to contribute to the healthcare system through the creation of strong partnerships.

As a trusted partner, we are actively looking to work alongside the Ministry of Health and the rest of the private sector, in order to provide accessible healthcare for everyone and help Saudi Arabia successfully transition to value-based healthcare.

How advanced are you on the journey to demonstrating via data analysis and real-world evidence the direct impact that your products have on patients through data?

Data is at the core of any future value-based healthcare proposal. However, there are certain therapies – such as pacemakers – where we have made a positive impact for our patients. Another example is the Diabeter Center which was established in KSA alongside the Ministry of Health (MOH) in 2020, with a mission to improve patient outcomes, prevent health complications, and provide better access to efficient diabetes care across the Kingdom. We have been able to achieve a tremendous amount of success due to our model of value-based healthcare, reducing the hospitalization rate of Type 1 diabetes patients to less than 0.5 percent.

Which elements of Medtronic’s global portfolio across cardiac & vascular, minimally invasive therapies, restorative therapies and diabetes can have the biggest impact on Saudi Arabia’s healthcare system?

The pandemic disrupted the sector, across all therapies, seizing most hospital and government resources. Hospitals had to become more efficient and better manage their resources and capacity, implement new hospital infrastructure, as well as integrate digital health solutions like telemedicine. At Medtronic, our innovative technologies meant that we could play a significant role in helping healthcare systems address and minimize the burden of chronic and acute conditions; and prevent further delays in the diagnosis and treatment of non-Covid-related health emergencies, such as acute myocardial infarctions and strokes. At Medtronic, we are always innovating, creating smarter, faster, and smaller devices. A good example of this is the PillCam, a device that allows for direct visualization of the small bowel, supporting greater confidence when monitoring lesions that may be related to Crohn’s disease, obscure bleeding, or iron deficiency

anaemia. Combining computer models and real-world data, our engineers build virtual representations — or “digital twins” — of devices to predict how they will respond in the human body under various circumstances. That testing capability helps create the most effective medical technology. When we bring together the mechanistic understanding [of a device] and patient data and understand the local healthcare system we get a much more complete picture about how that device and the patient will co-exist and contribute to an efficient healthcare system in the Kingdom.

Regarding technology adoption, most multinational pharma&biopharma companies have Saudi as a priority launch market. Is the situation similar for medical technology?

Saudi Arabia is eager for technology. The local authorities are looking to introduce the latest innovations in healthcare and are also working to upskill and better empower their healthcare practitioners. The country has invested in sending thousands of doctors to the US, Canada, and Europe to learn and train, which is why it currently has top surgeons across many therapies.

Medtronic, for its part, runs several clinical trials in the country. We have created numerous clinical trials registries, held key product launches and evaluations, and recently conducted a pre-market evaluation in Saudi for the first time.

We have been fully supported by Medtronic’s leadership at a global level, even during difficult times. The company considers the Kingdom as a cornerstone in its regional presence.

As part of the country’s industrialization strategy outlined in Vision 2030, we want to make Saudi a technological, industrial, and manufacturing hub for Medtronic. This year, we manufactured the first ventilator in partnership with local companies, sharing our schematics, service agreements, and components to produce the first medical device in the country.

What can you tell us about that experience about localization, considering that many multinationals are sceptical of localizing production, arguing that the country’s industrial capabilities need to still to improve?

Overall, we’ve had a great experience and found our partners to be capable of delivering on time and maintaining the quality of the products. We hope to see more opportunities in the future.

How do you perceive Medtronic’s contribution to Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030 and the specific performance targets and indicators proposed by the government such as extending life expectancy through improving health?

The Kingdom has set the ambitious goal of diversifying its economy and Medtronic is already contributing with manufacturing. However, to reach the goal of extending life expectancy, the population needs access and proper diagnostics. Saudi is working hard to improve both, investing heavily on access but progress on diagnostics has been comparatively slow. With an improvement in certain processes brought about by the pandemic, there is now a big opportunity to create better diagnosis, which will, in turn, lead to better treatments. Medtronic has an important role to play in this paradigm shift.

Is there a final message you would like to share with our readers?

Medtronic is committed to Saudi Arabia’s vision of providing affordable quality healthcare for the population. Our aim is to work closely with all key stakeholders; collaboration across both the public and private sectors is vital to creating an integrated model of care.

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