Sherif Amin – Country President, Novartis Egypt



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Sherif Amin, an 18-year industry veteran with 12 years of experience in oncology leadership roles across MEA, is the recipient of several awards, including the 2019 Oncology President Award, 2015 CEO Innovation Award, and 2014 MENA Leadership Award. A recent appointee as country president for Novartis Egypt, Amin describes how he draws on these experiences in his new role as Novartis undertakes a global restructuring. Amin also touches on the importance that Novartis – the domestic pharma market leader – attaches to Egypt and the role it hopes to play as a trusted partner within the country's ongoing healthcare transformation.

How has your professional journey led you to become Novartis' country president and its managing director for Egypt?

I have been Novartis' Egypt country president since July 20th, 2022, leading the Innovative Medicines division and the Novartis group, which includes Sandoz and Technical Operations (our production plant). Overall, I am honoured to be leading the number one pharma company in Egypt.

My multi-dimensional experiences working within and out of the country in diverse roles have given me the expertise and tools to lead Novartis in Egypt. Before this current role, in 2018, I held the Oncology General Manager position for the Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia and Libya cluster. During that period, we were able to reach more than 60,000 patients with our oncology and haematology portfolio in the cluster. All of this was possible thanks to the strong team we built; through hard work we were able to put the patient first… I consider this to be my biggest achievement during this time. Before that role, I was the company's Head of Market Access and Strategic Alliances

within the Oncology Division for the Middle East and Africa region. That position enabled me to see the Middle East region from an access perspective. The division needs to prioritize policy shaping, have good partnerships and manage access to our innovative portfolio to ensure Novartis Oncology medicines reach patients in need.

Altogether, I have 18 years of experience, 12 of which have been in leadership roles within Novartis. I am a firm believer that the key to success is to create a high-performing team; with that, everything is possible.

As for my studies, I am a pharmacist and graduated from the Faculty of Pharmacy of Alexandria University and received my MBA from Maastricht School of Management, the Netherlands in 2010.

Novartis recently announced a global reorganisation, removing some management layers and establishing new structures. Some of your peers may have decided to leave, but you stuck with Novartis. Why?

On a personal level, I am here because I believe in Novartis. We feel responsible for our employees, so we make all decisions carefully and with our goals in mind. Everyone who comes to work for us is treated with respect and has a sense of belonging to the organisation. Being treated fairly and appreciated helps employees stay excited, committed, and passionate about our future as a company…this is at the core of the organisation.

Indeed, in April 2022 Novartis announced the creation of the new organisational structure and operating model, aiming to accelerate growth, strengthen the pipeline and increase productivity. We are still making progress in implementing these new changes across the organisation and at the same time completing the appointments of the global leadership teams around the world and we aim to complete all of the tasks relating to Egypt by October 2022.

Our goal is to create a single commercial unit called Innovative Medicines that integrates the pharma and oncology divisions. I believe that this change will make us a faster and more agile company, an idea that has been there since the beginning of my 15 years working in oncology. As a result, now in 2022, the entire organisation has become more innovative. Fifteen years ago, our portfolio was completely different, aimed at a variety of diseases. The modifications we are implementing will enable us to remove redundancies and make the process more efficient. We expect to eliminate duplicates, simplify the process, and move faster in the way we relate and build relationships with our environment. We are taking this opportunity to reinvent our go-to-

market model and therefore not just consolidate pharma and oncology but transform our business model, making the organisation a better fit for the future, and centring it around patient and customer needs.

Evidently, with change, some people need to be let go, but we remain committed to a fair process and selecting the best candidates that best suit the future organisation, treating everyone with compassion and respect. We hope to conclude this process in the next couple of months, letting as few people go as possible.

Egypt is an emerging economy with the challenges that implies; will the staff being laid off have other opportunities to pursue in the country? How would you characterise the general employment panorama in the country today?

Egypt differs from other emerging markets. During the exit process, we go through the employee consultation and representative bodies and we treat all the impacted associates in a fair and transparent manner. We plan to equip them with support and the tools they need to find a new job, teaming up with third parties experienced in this area. We also allow impacted associates to apply for open positions across the organization for which they receive preferred treatment if there are comparable profiles from other candidates. In Egypt, a growing market, the possibilities of finding another job are there; particularly in pharma which has been growing exponentially. For this reason, I am sure there will be many positions to be filled.

How important is Egypt for Novartis within the region and what historical investments has the company made in the country?

Egypt is very important for Novartis, and Novartis is today the largest pharma company by revenue in the Egyptian market. Firstly, Egypt’s importance rests on the fact that the country has a growing population, serviced by a growing healthcare system. Secondly, Egypt managed to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic very successfully, making it clear that the government is committed to the healthcare system and therefore the health of its population. Thirdly, from an economic perspective, Egypt continues to take steps to facilitate foreign investments. Fourthly, the pharma market keeps growing and is estimated to rise by 12.3 percent by 2027; three times the average in the Middle East and Africa and well above the global rate. Finally, while generics companies are still the biggest players here, multinationals are the biggest contributor to overall market growth, which

is a strong sign of the country’s commitment to bringing innovation to its population and patients. Egypt is the second largest market in MEA today, but number one in volume, accounting for 42 percent of the MEA market

All of these factors make Egypt very interesting. With a healthcare system transformation underway and an increasing governmental openness to change; there are many more opportunities for Novartis to partner here. The current healthcare transformation could bring 100 million people under the umbrella of universal health insurance, thus growing the market extensively. The government is aiming for quality and innovative treatments, which comes at a cost, but funds have been allocated towards this aim and there is an overall willingness to progress.

The rollout of universal healthcare has led to role redistribution among the various government actors. What are your thoughts on this and on the Egyptian government’s approach to healthcare more broadly?

One major reason why Egypt is so attractive is because of its current and future potential. The government has made the commitment to transform the healthcare system. The idea of universal health insurance has been on the table for many years, but finally, it has become a real possibility. Building this system has always been a challenge as all responsibilities were previously put under the Ministry of Health, but now by creating new entities such as the Egyptian Drug Authority (EDA), which focuses on pharmaceuticals, registration and pricing, a lot of progress has been made and some of the load has been redistributed making the project more feasible. More importantly, we have witnessed a reduction in timelines for registration and reimbursement of new molecular entities.

Management and application of the universal health insurance system has involved the formation of three agencies separating the health service provision from the pooling and purchasing and quality supervision: the Universal Health Insurance Agency (UHIA) (i.e., the ‘purchaser’), the Healthcare Organization (HCO) (i.e., the ‘provider’), and the General Authority for Healthcare Accreditation and Regulation (GAHAR) which is responsible for quality assurance and accreditation.

This all shows that the government has thought things through, not just in terms of covering 100 million people but in providing a quality healthcare system and innovation.

Obviously, change needs time, but the government has taken the initiative on many projects, like the presidential initiative for Hepatitis C where Egypt became the first country to go from approximately 12 million patients to zero and this progress has been acknowledged by many healthcare organisations, profiling us as a trendsetter in the matter. Another major initiative from the government has been the Women's Health Initiative, with a focus on breast cancer, in which Novartis has been a key player from day one, working with the government, healthcare professionals, and education and bridging innovation to create new unified protocols to be used on a national level. Additionally, we are partnering on improving clinical research and bettering the infrastructure in the Ministry of Health's research centres.

The 100 Million Health initiative is another important initiative. This focuses on non-communicable diseases (NCDs) including cardiovascular disease which is related to 46 percent of deaths in the country. Not only does the Egyptian market's growth appeal to Novartis, but the fact that the government's priorities are also high on our priority list means that there are excellent opportunities for partnerships here. Cardiac surgeries on the waiting list are the highest, up to 53 percent of the patients on the waiting list in the Ministry of Health are cardiovascular patients, the average age of cardiovascular patients is12 years younger compared to the global average. This is a huge burden on the system and government if we compare it to Europe, for example. At Novartis, we are committed to serious discussions and initiatives to help in transforming cardiovascular disease in Egypt.

Given that cardiovascular disease is so prominent in Egypt, are partnerships and tech transfer on the table for Novartis to make a bigger impact, especially given Novartis' continuous innovation in this area?

Partnership for us goes beyond providing medicine, it starts with understanding the disease and the economic burden it brings with it. It is about mapping the patient's journey and making adjustments that fit this trajectory. There is a lot of work to be done before providing medicines; it is about having dedicated clinics, digitalising the journey of atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease (ASCVD) patients, and building data around it. We are talking about education, public awareness and looking for points to intervene but also bringing in innovation via treatments and medicines.

Data will also help us see how many patients will benefit, and how to reduce the amount of treatment needed and costs. We are able to do some of this, but still have a long way to go. Novartis is aiming to get on the big data stage and significantly transform how we operate here. In

relation to cardiovascular disease, two months ago we partnered with the biggest private hospital group, Cleopatra group, where we provide our data and digital capabilities and combine them with their excellent digital system in order to provide insights into the patient journey and find out how to improve their situation, be it the lab side, treatment aspect or diagnosis. We aim to make this a good example of a good collaboration model between pharma and healthcare providers nationwide.

In addition, we have been one of the first multinational players in manufacturing in Egypt. We have had a manufacturing site in Egypt for 58 years, where we export around 21 million units a year outside of Egypt. We have invested over USD 40 million in our manufacturing site in the last few years, producing oncology and haematology products for the first time in Egypt. This was encouraged by the government, but it made sense for Novartis as well. This collaboration should and will continue in the future,

What is the oncology situation in Egypt today and how can we expect it to develop in the future?

The oncology ecosystem is making progress, more so than other disease areas, as it is a priority for the government. It started with breast cancer and the Women's Health Initiative, with constant follow-up on the progress being made. This initiative and the resources allocated to this cause have paid off; today, a cancer patient in Egypt is treated similarly to their equivalent in a developed country. For many years it was only a dream but with this initiative, it has been made a reality. I have been working in MEA for many years and have not seen a campaign that has been able to touch more than 20 million women in such a short time and these numbers keep progressing daily. This is how effective the initiative is. It was not only about screening, but also about changing and building capabilities across the whole country, and most importantly building unified protocols for breast cancer. I am very proud that we have been a part of this journey, and now I see this kind of change moving from breast cancer to other disease areas, including lung cancer.

Are there any red flags for potential market entrants to watch out for in Egypt?

I would say companies operating in Egypt should understand that partnerships and innovative access models are fundamental to making it here. Besides that, there are always discussions to be made around pricing, volumes, and coverage, but overall, the Egyptian government has shown its

commitment to healthcare transformation, which is a major win for all involved: patients, authorities, and companies.

Is there any final message you would like to share with your global colleagues and peers?

Egypt is a growing market and continues to lead growth in the region. The healthcare transformation here represents an amazing opportunity to bring innovative access to Egyptian patients and the openness of the government to partner with the private sector should get us a triple win serving patients, healthcare systems and physicians to save the lives of the patients that live in this country

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