

# Eman Ali - Regional Vice President, Medtronic Africa

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*Based in Egypt, Medtronic Africa's regional vice president, Eman Ali, speaks about the challenges of building a strategic roadmap and local capabilities for the entire African continent from the ground up and adapting it to each country's needs by working directly with Medtronic's own team of 500 across 13 countries, or indirectly via its 78 partners in the region. She also discusses the company's efforts to further educate and spread awareness of new technologies in healthcare through its Centres of Excellence.*

## **Could you tell us a little about yourself and your journey at Medtronic?**

Currently, I am Vice President of Medtronic's Africa Region, but I joined the company back in 2019.

I have led the Cardiac Vascular Group (CVG) business and then built up the Strategic Market Enterprise for the Central Eastern Europe, Africa & Middle East (CEMA) region, and since February 2022, I have been leading and building up the strategic roadmap and local capabilities for Africa.

I am also a member of the CEMA Leadership team, leading a team of diverse African leaders that are managing the African continent, and serve as a member of the board of Medtronic's joint venture in Saudi Arabia along with the general managers for Medtronic Egypt and Morocco. With over 30 years of experience in the pharmaceutical, consumer health, vaccines and medical device industries, leading commercial operations in emerging markets and holding strategic global roles, I have been recognised among the top 20 percent of women in senior leadership.

Prior to joining Medtronic, I served as Global Head of Market Strategy and Development for Sanofi Pasteur based in France. This role was all about building a global strategy, integrating digital technologies and analytics, and steering business development and transversal projects. I also had the opportunity to lead the Africa, Middle East, Eurasia & South Asia vaccine business and worked closely with Ministries of Health, WHO, UNICEF, and other healthcare stakeholders to shape the vaccination calendars and move forward the 'End Polio' initiative. Even further back, I was country head for Bayer in Turkey and the Middle East, where I helped establish the company in several markets, championed acquisitions and divestment projects in the region, as well as worked on strategic government manufacturing agreements and partnerships.

On a more personal note, I have lived in Dubai, France, Turkey and now in Cairo; where I work and am the proud mother of one daughter. My focus and passion are transforming organisations, challenging the status quo, and developing talents in a diverse and inclusive environment.

### **How broad is Medtronic's presence in Africa and what importance does the continent hold for the company?**

Medtronic is a leading provider of medical technology for cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and minimally invasive surgery and treats more than 70 health conditions. From our Africa headquarters in Egypt - where we have a strong local presence - we collaborate closely with the healthcare sector to better serve patients. Our investments are not limited to investing in people and projects but also aim to reimagine healthcare through robust training and education programs that contribute to the introduction of new technologies, both to Egypt and emerging countries in Africa. These new technologies will provide new healthcare possibilities, better patient outcomes, and better economic value.

Medtronic designs medical technologies that help improve the lives of patients around the world, believing that technology can change patients' lives for the better. Thanks to our deep understanding of the human body, we are accelerating medical innovation. We use tools such as artificial intelligence, robotic-assisted surgery, data analytics and predictive modelling to launch a new and innovative phase in individualised medicine tailored to each patient's needs.

Back when I started, we used to look at Africa in pieces, on one side emerging Africa and on the other Southern Africa. Emerging Africa had Egypt as a hub and headquarters while Southern Africa headquarters was in South Africa. However, in 2022 it was decided to treat Africa as a whole and have one strategy and an African roadmap. Africa is a continent full of potential but also

challenges, so it requires a lot of focus and investment to get things done and be successful.

Therefore, we started to build a roadmap with many milestones that we wanted to achieve for this continent. All of this has to be built from the ground up, from infrastructure to distributors, and regulatory framework. Evidently, there are different levels to this across this vast continent and though Egypt and South Africa are where we have direct operations, there are many Northern African countries that are on an amazing progress track.

### **Why was Egypt chosen as Medtronic's base for the entire African continent?**

Egypt was chosen as Medtronic's headquarters for Africa as it is a country full of momentum with regards to the healthcare sector. The evolution of national health insurance, the new language of health economics and building case studies for reimbursement in conjunction with the Egyptian Authority for Unified Procurement (UPA) set the basis of what needed to be done strategically with the Ministry of Health.

For instance, the UPA monitors and pushes innovation into the market, maximising outcomes as much as possible... it keeps evolving and growing, getting involved with many initiatives like health economics, bringing value to the government, paying attention to big issues like childhood diabetes and possible solutions. Since there is momentum and willingness to evolve, a lot of investment has gone towards healthcare; all of the same therapies that are offered in the private sector are also present on the UPA platform, thereby granting patients with access to quality treatment.

Through this journey, the Egyptian government has understood that minimally invasive options in some cases might cost more, but over time could save money; the same happens with prevention; if a pathology is detected early, it could save the patient from complications down the line and avoid straining the budget. Egypt not only has this understanding and is making investments accordingly, but also empowers a highly qualified healthcare leadership group that is making all of this growth happen; in other words, Egypt is the cornerstone of the continent. We want to spread this momentum all over, as there are many qualified professionals and eagerness for change, and Egypt has the ability to give back and share the knowledge with other doctors in the sub-Saharan region and other countries in Africa. The agenda is packed with things to do and there is a lot of promise and optimism.

## **Which areas of Medtronic's portfolio have the most potential impact within Egypt?**

The therapy with highest potential for change and impact for diabetic patients would be the insulin pump. By focusing on around 40,000 children with Type I diabetes who could be eligible for the pump in Egypt, we can be sure that with the pump all of them are getting the insulin they need, at the right time with the right dose. That leads to an improvement not only of their health but their entire life, as this tedious task becomes automated, leading to a sense of normalcy. The pump also impacts the patients in the long term and reduces their costs, because when the patient is controlled from a young age, fewer complications will arise in the future.

Diabetes for children is high on the Ministry of Health's agenda as well as for the UPA. Consequently, we need to make sure that the budget is there, and Medtronic is committed to coming with an approach that does not burden the system. I think we have very good communications with all the parties involved but are still working on hitting some other milestones that could improve further our success.

## **How does Medtronic adjust its business model based on specific countries' circumstances?**

Whenever we enter a country, we make sure to look closely at our portfolio and see what we have to offer that best meets that country's needs. A close consideration of portfolio, geography and type of customer are essential to creating a successful business model.

Specifically in Egypt, you have the UPA as the major player on the government side, and the private hospitals on the other side. Medtronic is committed to collaborating with hospitals in both the private and public sectors and has strategic partnerships in place with big groups like Alameda, and emerging projects like Capital Med. Our partnerships also include collaboration with medical universities, as well as the establishment of a Centre of Excellence in key focus areas. In order for those partnerships to function, we have to be sure that we are bringing the right innovation and support.

How does one divide time and resources effectively? How to choose the right business model? We organize ourselves by all these details, with cardiovascular being one of the important pieces for us. Therefore, when it comes to anything related to cardiovascular disease, we deal with it directly with our own team. We work hand in hand with channel partners to make sure that together we are delivering exactly the same value to the market for other therapy areas like diabetes or

neuroscience.

This hybrid model, whereby we sometimes work directly with our own team – as for cardiovascular Portfolio in Egypt – as well as indirectly via partners can be seen throughout the continent.

Medtronic Africa has more than 500 team members in 13 countries, two direct operations in Egypt and South Africa, and 78 partners across the rest of the continent.

### **What can you tell us about the potential in the Egyptian market today?**

When we talk about Egypt, we need to consider both the current market and the market we have not yet penetrated. With cardiovascular disease, we have achieved great penetration, but there are still more people to reach and the market is not yet saturated. Regarding stroke, we must manage the process better and ensure that patients can get attention within the first hours of the incident. When talking about diabetes, we are discussing reimbursement for the insulin pump for children with type 1 diabetes. We are hoping to see it come to life after the great efforts from UPA and Medtronic offering patients the therapy, training and support at an economic value in order to lead normal lives and avoid any long-term complications resulting from non-compliance.

Overall, the market is not tapped out, we are still in the early stages and there is much more innovation to be brought... the sky is the limit and the sector will continue to aggressively grow and in the end, this will benefit patients.

### **How well received are Medtronic's most innovative new technologies in Egypt and Africa today and how is the company attempting to educate stakeholders about these products' benefits?**

Medtronic is well sought after from a technology and innovation perspective. One big step to further educate and spread awareness of new technologies in healthcare is the creation of our Centres of Excellence. Everybody is eager to go and learn – no matter what their level or speciality – and they are eager to attend workshops and hands-on sessions with our new technologies. This is encouraging as part of the problem within the medical device industry is upskilling, making sure that healthcare professionals are trained and can operate different devices. It is indeed an area we focus on and think there should be other centres of excellence across the continent, i.e. in South Africa we have a training centre inside universities, whereas in Turkey there is a big training centre for surgical innovations...we also invest in virtual reality (VR) equipment as a tool and resource for

education and training.

Training is a core value for us, this is an area that will benefit the patient immensely. Data-driven decision making is key for the future and there is a need for medical device companies to come together and try to gather and use data, which is hard to do. We also need to drive more innovation and provide even better solutions to patients than the ones that are currently available. That is going to change the game in the future. I believe in the ecosystem we need to find the balance between short and mid-term. Pushing prices down is not the answer as it takes away a lot of benefits, decreases quality, increases risks, and limits services and innovation. The tender system needs to evolve with a data-driven approach, proven value and long-term impact with clear health economic assessments and outcomes.

### **What are the easy wins that Egypt can contribute through the continent?**

A big area where Egypt can contribute is training and education. Creating hubs to train and upskill African healthcare professionals, as well as sharing procurement models driven by value, would be a major step we can take to support the evolution of the continent. I think it is possible to achieve, as there are many bodies, like Gavi, UNICEF, and the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that can bring countries together and establish positive connections. As for the procurement, the idea is great, but the execution is extremely complicated; we would have to learn from other healthcare experiences.

### **How can Medtronic contribute as a game changer for diversity in Egypt and Africa?**

More than diversity, I believe we need more inclusive leaders. Inclusivity is the key factor, because we can have the most diverse country and people, but if we are not willing to understand or tolerate each other, we can never get things done and bring value through our differences.

I was pleasantly surprised when I came back to Egypt and saw that in Medtronic more women were involved in top leadership positions, making up around 30 percent. I am sure this will continue to grow. It is an ongoing journey and there is still more to be done with the women's network, women leaders, etc. It must be done all over, multinationals and small businesses, and not limited only to gender, but also age, background, and education. This is crucial to the growth and development of both the country and the organisation.

## **What are the key factors that attract top talent to work at Medtronic?**

My own personal strategy is to share with others what attracted me to Medtronic. Medtronic is a great company with a strong mission, to alleviate pain and save lives. We saw this core value during the COVID pandemic, as Medtronic opened up access to ventilators for those who needed them...it showed that this is a company that practices what it preaches.

Another amazing thing about Medtronic is that we value the team, and its people; hence the focus on education, training, and career development. The company tries to understand its workers and accompany them through their journey; thus inclusion and diversity are very important; from opportunities to compensation and everything that has to do with the welfare of our team members. Medtronic strives to do things the best way possible, the right way, but always putting people first. We believe in what we do; it is beneficial for the patient, for the employees and for the entire continent.

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