Oscar Delgado – General Manager MEA, Bristol Myers Squibb



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Bristol Myers Squibb's Oscar Delgado outlines the firm's successes in bringing innovative medicines to the Middle East and Africa in recent years, how its strategy plays out in an economically diverse region, why partnerships are of vital importance, and the ways in which BMS is participating in Egypt's healthcare transformation.

Considering all the changes that have happened in the world in recent years, what have been some of the most important evolutions within the MEA region for Bristol Myers Squibb since we last spoke a year and a half ago?

Many things changed in the last year and a half, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The last few years have been challenging especially with the number of restrictions when travelling and interacting with people face-to-face, leading to new ways of engaging people and driving the business We learned from it, and at Bristol Myers Squibb we are bringing the best and making the most out of it with the right balance between presential and remote working.

Today we offer our teams a good level of flexibility with the possibility of up to 50% of working hours being done remotely. We really want to promote a positive work-life balance and establish innovative ways of hybrid scheduling while retaining our focus on collaborative work.

It is clear that COVID-19 changed the way we live and work, not only for Bristol Myers Squibb, but all stakeholders in healthcare and beyond. In a way, the pandemic was a learning experience which proved that digital channels could provide a new way of communication and that leveraging these systems can be an effective tool to connect with our healthcare stakeholders.

MEA is quite different from other regions in the world and many of the macro issues that are being faced globally have varying impacts on the countries here. From your experience, what can you tell us about the current economic and business sentiments being felt locally?

The Middle East and Africa is a very diverse region with a set of countries that are still very dependent on natural resources like oil. When you have major events globally and within the region, there can be a massive disparity in the local impacts across different countries. With a greater need for energy generation, some countries are receiving an economic boost while others might feel negative impacts. For some countries, this might be an event which highlights the need to diversify their economy and implement reforms to become less dependent on natural resources in the future.

Currently, the global economy is feeling serious pressure that impacts countries like Egypt where we see currency devaluation and difficulties to import goods and services. These factors cause shifts in the local economic dynamics of the country which triggered consequences such as rising inflation and affordability issues.

Globally, Bristol Myers Squibb revenues went up in 2021 compared to 2020 with strong revenue growth across the portfolio and new products playing an increasingly important role. How has the situation been in MEA and are there substantial achievements that you feel the local Bristol Myers Squibb team was able to reach?

Reflecting Bristol Myers Squibb’s positioning not only in the region, but also globally, we remain very committed to our mission to discover, develop, and deliver innovative medicines that help patients prevail over serious diseases. We have one of the most promising pipelines in the industry in key disease areas of oncology, haematology, immunology, and cardiovascular.

Over the last few years, we have been very successful in bringing innovative medicines to the region. These achievements were accomplished by creating strong education platforms across the

countries and participating in early engagement with both key internal and external stakeholders, including the Ministry of Health, other regulatory and reimbursement bodies, and even the health technology assessment bodies which have become increasingly present in the different countries in the region. Beyond the regulators, we also are sure to connect with health professionals and patient advocacy groups. With all these stakeholders, we make sure to strategically prioritize our efforts across multiple countries and disease areas. In MEA, we have a clear mandate to go above and beyond in ensuring that Bristol Myers Squibb's innovative medicines are made available in this region.

Last year was a great year for Bristol Myers Squibb globally as well as in the MEA region. However, what is more important is that we continue our journey to renew and grow our business despite the loss of exclusivity in some of our past key-growth drivers. Still, we are very excited about our current and future portfolios in the region. As long as we stay focused on the mission of bringing the latest innovations to help more and more patients, we can expect our growth within the region to be very significant.

MEA is quite diverse in that it holds both middle- to high-income countries like Saudi Arabia that tend to adopt innovation at the early stages as well as low- and middle-income countries like Egypt that historically have not. How has Bristol Myers Squibb been adapting its sizeable global portfolio to this second group of countries?

If we look at the region itself, we see a number of emerging countries which are at very different stages of development. However, they do have a common objective to strengthen and upgrade their healthcare systems to be able to support more and more patients across the region.

One of our strategies as a company is to promote health equity globally and provide universal access to life-saving medicines across these economically diverse, middle to low-income countries. As Bristol Myers Squibb, we ensure that we take these factors into consideration in the way we approach countries in the MEA region. We are working very heavily to support efforts to reduce pressure and improve the equality of access to medicines and healthcare services. In this regard, we have multiple programs worldwide, to help strengthen health systems' capacity for access to treatment of serious diseases. Even in some lower-income countries, we have an approach that includes some philanthropic strategies for tiered pricing and granting of licensing in order to strengthen health capacities. We need to look at each country individually and examine what are the unique needs and capabilities of each country so that Bristol Myers Squibb can better support

these diverse healthcare systems individually.

Egypt is one of the countries in the region undergoing a healthcare transformation, most notably attempting to bring the entirety of its 100 million+ population under a universal health insurance scheme. How does Bristol Myers Squibb view Egypt and the Egyptian market?

We can see a transformation of the healthcare system in Egypt over the past few years. This has really led the industry to consider Egypt as an attractive country for pharmaceutical investment in the region. We are aware that Egypt is working to increase public-private partnership opportunities for the development of the health sector.

For many countries, not only Egypt, one of the main healthcare system objectives is localization For Egypt specifically, it's obvious as well to see their strong determination to also strengthen their capabilities and knowledge. As Bristol Myers Squibb we can support these countries through innovation that will help to develop those capabilities, clinical trials, and infrastructure that can support efficiencies, across the system.

After my recent visit to Egypt, I'm very optimistic about the future potential of the country. I have seen there is a large number of opportunities to collaborate with authorities, and the government has made a very clear commitment to transforming the healthcare system. For instance, there are many initiatives in place at different levels such as strategies to ensure that cancer patients in Egypt are treated at the same level as in developed countries. Egypt should be very proud of all these initiatives, and we as Bristol Myers Squibb are excited to be part of this journey. We look forward to having more collaboration with authorities for the benefit of patients here in Egypt.

Given the central focus that health has for governments in your region, including Egypt, everyone is keen to develop the right partnership models to ensure access to medicines. In your view what are the key factors that make partnerships effective in Egypt?

There are multiple ways of collaborating with authorities on the development of healthcare systems. For example, helping to build infrastructure or opportunities to improve registration processes where improved clarity is important in order to agree on the right strategy by which a particular disease treatment is determined. More importantly, we need to determine pathways for

providing solutions and alternatives to treating patients in need who are suffering from serious diseases like cancer. Therefore, these programs like “100 Million SEHA” /and other WHO-endorsed initiatives, that have a clear objective to reach as many patients as possible and deliver the best treatment possible is something that we really want to be part of. We really see in these initiatives an opportunity for collaboration across all stakeholders.

Another important component when it comes to improving overall survival for some of the most serious diseases is the ability to screen and detect the disease in its very earliest stages. Together with the regulators, we are working on improving infrastructures to ensure that patients are not only getting access to the most advanced medicines but also that patients are getting diagnosed at an early stage where the chances of effective treatment are much higher.

One of the hot topics in healthcare today is the recruitment of data among different stakeholders, especially regulators. What has been your experience with the use of data in Egypt? Is this still a very complicated task given the country’s current infrastructure?

I believe that there is still room for improvement when it comes to the use of data. Egypt is big not only in terms of population but also in terms of infrastructure and its number of hospitals and healthcare professionals. As part of this journey to upgrade and develop the local healthcare system, it is a priority to really work around the organization of data and information. Here, companies like Bristol Myers Squibb can play an important role in helping with well-informed decision-making when it comes to how to treat patients based on local real-world evidence data and what is the best use of the current and future system to generate such information.

The push for universal healthcare is a massive paradigm shift for the country, the likes of which are not seen very often. However, there is still a long way to go with many questions to be answered. What operational model/approach do you expect to see for Egypt between its current private sector and upcoming public system? How might this evolve moving forward?

This is a very ambitious journey with timelines to make sure that universal health healthcare can become a reality. In the short term, private contributions will continue to be significant, but I have no doubt that the public system will evolve over time thanks to the current vision, objectives, and planning of the government. Right now, what matters most is looking at how we can work together

along journey.

As the private industry, we have a role to play in collaborating with the main public sector stakeholders to make this project a reality. Companies like Bristol Myers Squibb have a responsibility to support the local government in developing the public system and I have no doubt that in the future it will prove to be a very successful initiative.

Currently, BMS does not have a direct country head sitting in Egypt and the country is managed through the regional cluster based out of the UAE. How do you make sure you can keep your finger on the pulse of what is happening in Egypt as an active participant in the market and what partnerships does BMS have in place to show its presence here?

Historically, Egypt has always been a country of extraordinary importance for Bristol Myers Squibb, considering the population size, potential of unmet medical needs, level of medical education, and interest to develop the healthcare system. We are working at multiple levels with multiple stakeholders to ensure that Bristol Myers Squibb provides the proper level of support to the country, healthcare system, physicians, and patients. Our objective is to ensure that Bristol Myers Squibb is able to deliver innovation by working closely with the main stakeholders including different health insurances, the UPA (Egyptian Authority for Unified Procurement, Medical Supply, and Technology Management) the EDA (Egyptian Drug Authority), and any public-private opportunities for collaboration.

There are always multiple ways make to make this Egyptian vision successful and what matters most is the outcome. We are very confident as Bristol Myers Squibb that we will successfully deliver our objectives while supporting the country in its healthcare journey.

Is there any final message you would like to share with your colleagues in the Middle East and globally?

Egypt is a country of extraordinary strategic value for Bristol Myers Squibb. We are aware of the significant efforts that Egypt is putting into place as it moves towards universal health care. As BMS we want to be part of this journey. As a company, our objective to deliver innovative medicines that help patients prevail over serious diseases and locally we strive to make these treatments available to patients in Egypt by working hand in hand with the main stakeholders.

I have no doubts that Egypt has a bright future ahead despite all challenges that comes naturally alongside change. As long as we are sharing the vision that Egypt has and working united in the same direction, Egypt and companies like Bristol Myers Squibb can have a very successful partnership together.

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