

# Khaled Elrefae - General Manager, Ipsen MEA

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*The MEA region is indisputably becoming a growth hub for Ipsen*

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*General manager of MEA, Khaled Elrefae, explains how Ipsen has strengthened its footprint in the region over the past two years - starting in the UAE and expanding into Saudi Arabia - and in so doing turned MEA into one of its growth centres. As the company plans to increase its presence in Egypt, he also discusses the opportunities presented by the country's current healthcare transformation.*

**Can you begin by giving our audience an overview of Ipsen's operations in the MEA region and any key updates that have taken place in the two years since we last spoke?**

Ipsen is a biopharmaceutical company focusing on innovation and specialty care. As part of a global geographic expansion strategy, we are collaborating with local distributors in the MEA region to realise our goal of making medical innovations available to patients in a timely manner.

The company established its first legal presence in MEA with an office in Dubai Healthcare City back in 2020, which is now being expanded, and we are planning to officially open another technical and scientific office in Saudi Arabia at the beginning of 2023. This is a very exciting time for Ipsen, as our highly motivated team forges even closer relationships with key stakeholders in the region to achieve our aims.

## **What do you foresee as the main benefit of creating this stronger on-the-ground footprint for Ipsen in the region?**

The first benefit is an improvement to the speed at which we can bring Ipsen innovations to the Saudi and UAE markets. Across Ipsen's three focus areas of oncology, neuroscience, and rare diseases, this stands to have a big impact on patients.

The other key benefit is better collaboration and interaction with stakeholders in the region. Just last year, Ipsen was selected as a partner of choice by the Emirates Society of Oncology to raise awareness of neuroendocrine tumours (NET), an often-misdiagnosed cancer. We have also been closely collaborating with the UAE Ministry of Health on various access programs for our innovative medicines.

## **Was it a challenge to find the right people to staff these new offices in Saudi Arabia and the UAE?**

To transform – as Ipsen is doing in the region – you need people to lead. Moreover, to get these people on board you need to have a story that resonates with them. Our story of business model transformation and renewed commitment to Middle Eastern patients is doing just that.

Additionally, it is not only about bringing the talent in; Ipsen also has a responsibility to retain that talent by providing our people with great development opportunities to learn and grow within the organization. This has been key to the company's growth over the last three to four years.

## **How has Ipsen MEA been performing in recent years and what are the fundamentals behind the numbers?**

The MEA region is indisputably becoming a growth hub for Ipsen. Our CAGR in MEA is a solid double growth in coming years for several years already.

There are several factors behind this strong performance. The first is the launching of new products, which the offices in Saudi Arabia and the UAE have helped facilitate in those markets. We have also been able to launch new products in the other Gulf states as well as Egypt.

The innovative access solutions we have been working on with stakeholders in the region through our distributors have also been crucial, as have the awareness campaigns launched by our medical

departments.

**What is the importance of Egypt within Ipsen's MEA operations, and might the company consider establishing an office there as it has done in Saudi Arabia and the UAE?**

IQVIA forecasts Egypt's pharma market to grow at a CAGR of 12 percent from 2021 to 2026, triple the global and Middle East averages. Furthermore, Egypt is the largest market in MEA in terms of volume and second only behind Saudi in value, but it is on course to reach USD 11 billion by 2027, making it the region's largest in terms of value as well. Multinational companies make up most of the market, which is very promising, as is the massive healthcare transformation and reform currently underway there.

As mentioned, geographical expansion is a key part of Ipsen's strategy, starting in the UAE before moving to Saudi, and today the company is looking into establishing a presence in Egypt via a local distributor. We are in the process of finalizing a partnership with one of the key local distributors in Egypt, which will help bring our medicines to patients in the country.

**What does Ipsen look for in a distribution partner?**

Within Ipsen we have a very robust due diligence process involving all stakeholders from medical to marketing, business ethics, legal, quality, and pharmacovigilance, which allows us to select optimum partners. We look for partners with a very strong presence within the country, an excellent supply chain, a wealth of local market expertise, and high standards of ethics and compliance.

**Which of Ipsen's three main therapeutic areas of oncology, neurology, and rare diseases will be the priority in the Egyptian market?**

We are currently supporting patients living with hard-to-treat cancers and neurological conditions. We are also working very hard with the Egyptian rare disease community to better understand their needs and be able to support them in the future.

**Egypt's healthcare transformation has involved the creation of several new governmental entities. How has this affected the regulatory process in your view?**

Firstly, the massive transformation of the Egyptian healthcare system is great news for patients and carers. The country has become a more attractive destination for industry investments. This means patients may be able to access an increased number of therapeutic innovations at pace in the future. At Ipsen we would like to play a role in improving people's lives and health outcomes in line with Egypt's Vision 2030 transformation goals.

The creation of a fast-track regulatory mechanism within the Egyptian Drug Authority (EDA) is a game changer and can move the dial from patients having to wait three to four years for a drug following FDA or EMA approval to having access within 18 to 24 months.

The second important transformation is the creation of the Egyptian Authority for Unified Procurement (UPA), which aims to secure the highest quality products at the best price. The Egyptian government has shown a clear willingness to establish value-based methods, evidence-based technology assessment tools, and robust supply chain options, all of which create transparency in pricing methodology and streamline access.

A third significant change is the creation of a unified healthcare insurance system, connecting healthcare organisations with local insurance agencies and regulators. It is fantastic to see all stakeholders involved in the management of healthcare sitting down together and trying to put a new process and system in place, thereby creating universal coverage for Egypt's 100 million-plus population.

**Does Ipsen have a preference in terms of entering the public or private markets in Egypt?**

Patients – whether served by the public or private sector – are Ipsen's core focus and it is our responsibility to bring therapeutic innovations to them as quickly as possible. We will continue to work with stakeholders in both sectors through our local partners to create access solutions and foster awareness. In terms of the public sector, I am highly optimistic that we will be able to continue having concrete discussions with the UPA and ensure our medicines are accessible to patients who need them most

**Given the differences between countries in the Middle East in terms of income levels and population sizes, how feasible is the rolling out of similar access programs across the region? Are country-specific approaches needed?**

Patient groups and specifics of healthcare systems vary across the Middle East. Our goal is to work together with stakeholders across the board in each country and roll out tailor-made patient access programs. We are looking beyond the HTA lenses and trying to identify inefficiencies along the patient journey and tackle those in partnership with our stakeholders and improve healthcare outcomes for patients.

**How would you like Ipsen to develop in Egypt over the next few years? What would success look like to you?**

It is our responsibility at Ipsen to partner with other stakeholders to better understand what patients need and provide them with the relevant access and support.

The country has a growing population; a government that is committed to healthcare, collaboration with industry, and foreign investment; and several new bodies that create opportunities to better reach and help patients. Egypt is also embracing innovation as part of its healthcare transformation, meaning that our medicines could reach patients more rapidly than ever before.

Egypt is part of the Middle East where challenges do exist, especially around access, but these are broad concerns not specific to the Egyptian context.

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