

Anthony Y. Lauw - GM & Head of Human Pharma Northwest Africa, Boehringer Ingelheim



By establishing our on-ground presence in the dynamic and commercial hub of Casablanca, we can contribute to the steady growth of the healthcare landscape in Morocco and the wider region

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Dr Anthony Y. Lauw, GM & Head of Human Pharma Northwest Africa at Boehringer Ingelheim, explains the operations of a cluster that has typically worked with local partners, but that now has also opened a new scientific office in Casablanca with the idea of expanding the company's on-ground operations in the region. In addition, he outlines Boehringer Ingelheim's efforts to contribute to the evolution of Morocco's healthcare landscape.

What have been your first impressions of the Moroccan market since you took on this role last year?

In May 2022, I was entrusted to lead Boehringer Ingelheim's operations in Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria just as the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic was ending. Looking back, the pandemic exposed how closely connected health, society, and the economy are, and the impact that the research-based pharmaceutical industry can have in solving major challenges that humanity faces.

Early on, we had the opportunity to introduce some of our new breakthrough drugs – mainly in diabetes, chronic heart failure and rare lung diseases – from Boehringer Ingelheim's innovative portfolio to the Moroccan market. These products address important unmet needs in Moroccan healthcare. The launches also required a strong local team across regulatory affairs, medical affairs, market access, and other commercial functions.

Our next step, and future milestone, is to ensure that these medicines are reimbursed and that patients have access to them. It is important for us to achieve this, and we have high hopes that the country's ongoing healthcare reform will play a positive role in fostering this access and transforming patients' lives.

Does your role also encompass Boehringer Ingelheim's animal health arm?

It does. Boehringer Ingelheim's purpose is to improve the lives of both humans and animals, and we believe that there is a deep interconnected relationship between humans and animals – whether pets, farm animals, or wild animals – and the environment.

As a part of our Sustainable Development for Generations (SD4G) initiatives, I am involved in the company's sustainability projects. In this region, our team focuses on sustainable and holistic solutions in the fight against rabies. We are engaging both our human pharma and animal health divisions to find them. Rabies is a virus that, when it infects a dog or another animal, it can cause the animal to bite humans. When an unvaccinated human is infected with the rabies virus, they have a very short window to get a vaccination, otherwise they could die. This disease takes a human life every nine minutes.

For this project, we work together with the authorities to understand where rabies pandemic hotspots are and once we get alignment and authorisation, immunize pets and stray dogs, avoid reintroduction of the disease through wildlife vaccination, and help communities establish structures to fight rabies themselves. By establishing these structures, we can really start fighting rabies together.

Can you outline the operating model, size, and presence of Boehringer Ingelheim in your region?

The cluster I represent encompasses African countries where French is spoken with a focus on Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. Our headquarters are in Morocco. We have been operating for more than 20 years in the region and are represented by the local company Bottu for our human pharma portfolio here in Morocco. Both Bottu and Boehringer Ingelheim are family owned, with closely aligned key values. The partnership has been very stable. Both companies value high quality and see the importance of a long-term vision. Today Bottu continues to manufacture locally and promotes our mature portfolio in Morocco. In animal health, we are presented by our distributors

Amcovet, Casavet and Multi Chemical Industry (MCI).

In May 2023 we opened our scientific office in Casablanca. This important step means that we now have a local team including medical regulatory, medical affairs, market access and commercial functions such as medical representatives running the operations in the country. To meet local needs, we are expanding our on-ground operations with our focus being on diabetes, cardiology, nephrology and a range of rare pulmonary diseases, the largest being idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis. In animal health, we have been working with MCI to formulate antigens and provide foot and mouth disease vaccines within a short period of time. Our portfolio is evolving nicely thanks to the company's deep-rooted, innovation-led mindset.

Overall, Boehringer Ingelheim boasts approximately 120 staff in the three countries including medical and regulatory affairs, market access and commercial functions. Through partners, we have local production in Morocco and in Algeria.

In the past we have seen multinationals wanting to expand and put a local entity in every country in the region. However, the trend has shifted and several multinationals are leaving North Africa. Can you explain your decision to continue to invest in this part of the world and why you still believe in its potential?

As a successful family-owned company we plan in generations and seek partnerships in which we can operate in a sustainable, transparent and predictable environment. Like our Moroccan partnership with Bottu, we also have successful partnerships in Algeria which evolved into the local production of two medications and, in 2021, the creation of a legal entity. In terms of ease of doing business, Morocco is the most straightforward geography in the region, but there is interesting potential in all three countries. Moreover, we do not need to deliver quarter-by-quarter financial results, but can instead focus on longer-term generational investments. Our goal is to maximise affordable patient access to our innovation in areas of high unmet medical need.

An example of how we operate differently is our Angels Initiative on acute stroke care in Algeria. When a patient has a stroke, there is only a certain amount of time during which the cloth blocking the flow of blood to the brain can be resolved. Receiving treatment within that window is critical for survival and to retain a functional brain. We help hospitals become 'stroke-ready' so that patients who have just suffered a stroke can be treated as quickly and effectively as possible. This includes putting processes in place for when the stroke patient comes into the emergency room and related next steps to save their lives.

Boehringer Ingelheim has a broad portfolio of products across cardiovascular, metabolic, rare lung diseases and oncology. What is the level of access to these medicines in Morocco?

The development potential of the Moroccan pharmaceutical sector is significant, especially in the context of the ongoing expansion efforts to introduce universal healthcare. Boehringer Ingelheim is a research-driven biopharmaceutical company that innovates and strives to improve the level of care available, but we are dependent on governments to accelerate access to innovation and improve the availability of reimbursed medicines.

As an active member of the association of multinational pharma companies in Morocco, LEMM, we have been diligently working on proposals and suggestions aimed at ensuring that our treatments are available here with the best value proposition for all stakeholders. We are committed to tackling societal challenges in partnership work with governments to drive progress and create more equitable access. Our hope is that the reform will provide access to innovative treatments for all patients; that requires significant changes.

What role do you foresee for the pharma industry in Morocco's ongoing healthcare transformation?

We share the ambition laid out by His Majesty King Mohammed VI to expand reimbursed access for Moroccan patients. We are keen to understand how much of this ambition will be dedicated towards opportunities in life science innovation and continued investment in research-based sectors, as scientific innovation has the potential to truly transform the lives of Moroccan patients.

Part of our strategy with our new scientific office in Morocco, is to accelerate the delivery of these transformative innovative therapies. We strive to become the partner of choice because our medications are setting new standards. I truly believe there is great potential in the Moroccan healthcare sector with a fruitful journey in the years ahead, one that is studded with success and improved health for all.

Can you expand on some of the most important Moroccan initiatives that Boehringer Ingelheim is engaged in?

By establishing our on-ground presence in the dynamic and commercial hub of Casablanca, we can contribute to the steady growth of the healthcare landscape in Morocco and the wider region and transform lives for generations to come. Our efforts include close collaborations with leading medical societies, patient associations and healthcare experts in research, development, and daily clinical practice. As we pursue reimbursement, we are increasingly looking towards the generation and use of real-world epidemiological data. Understanding how to run post-marketing trials and generate data is hugely important, and an area in which there is a big opportunity for Morocco to progress.

Another pillar of our efforts is to work closely with healthcare professionals across the country to improve capacities and encourage the early diagnosis of the diseases we treat. Our medical representatives and medical affairs colleagues help educate doctors about the therapeutic areas of our drugs, work with medical societies, and support scientific conferences and events.

What do you hope to achieve with Boehringer Ingelheim in Northwest Africa over the next two to three years?

Boehringer Ingelheim has an extraordinarily rich pipeline, especially in specialty medicines and rare diseases. The main hope and challenge for these three countries is to ensure that they continue to integrate the scientific innovation that we are bringing forward into their healthcare systems. There is a need for local experts on the ground who have broad experience with new medications and are ready to continue that journey of innovation. This is a cycle, in which you learn about new medications, gain your own experience on how to optimise the use of the treatment and then be ready if something new comes along. For me, the main ambition is to ensure that access levels in the Maghreb countries are top notch, and that we act as a partner to help healthcare professionals stay up to date and treat their patients to the best of their ability.

Could you highlight some of your key learnings over your past 16 years with Boehringer Ingelheim?

I have many professionals from different backgrounds around me, but we all have a very similar perspective. The allure of scientific research drew me from being a physician in surgery to pharma. I realized how this industry is at the forefront of innovation and the development of new technologies. I was fascinated by how our work has a positive impact on the lives of millions of

people. Each one of us can make a difference. When an organisation has an innovation-led mindset, it can create a true pipeline of innovation, which in the end has a big impact on patients.

Looking at the key drugs that we are currently launching, I see how the teams are successfully working together to ensure that there are improved outcomes, not only for the patients but also for the overall community. Being part of the team that is making a difference is one of the biggest motivators for me.

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