Pierre Behnam – Director Africa Middle-East Türkiye, Pierre Fabre



I am confident that over time, with joint work between innovators and health authorities, we will find a solution that will get the necessary treatments to patients [in Morocco]

02.11.2023

Tags: Morocco, MEA, MENA, Turkey, Pierre Fabre, Innovation, Access, Strategy

Pierre Fabre has been present in the Moroccan market for nearly 40 years. Pierre Behnam, the company's director for Africa, Middle-East and Türkiye discusses its strategy for bringing innovation and targeted therapies to patients in Morocco.

Can you begin by giving us a brief introduction to your role, focus, and priorities particularly in a region as large and dynamic as Africa, Middle-East and Türkiye (AFMET)?

The AFMET region is dynamic and diverse, geographically spanning all the way from South Africa to Türkiye and with varying degrees of maturity in each of these markets and their healthcare systems. Because of this diversified environment, we need to adapt to different scenarios and ensure the strategy for the group remains the same across the region. Our focus areas are dermatology and oncology.

These segments present different priorities. First, looking at dermatology, our objective is to continue to introduce prescription dermatological drugs and dermo-cosmetic ranges focusing on bringing new products and therapies forward. At the same time, we continue our strategy of focusing our medical and scientific communication on specialist physicians, while working through pharmaceutical distribution channels.

With respect to oncology, our product portfolio includes mature therapies as well as innovative treatments. One of our therapies is used to treat Breast and Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer and this kind of drug corresponds well to the needs in the region with respect to efficacy, tolerability, and affordability. We are also introducing new targeted therapies in Breast, Melanoma, Colorectal cancers. We have launched these products in Europe, and we are in the process of launching them across the AFMET region by 2025.

The launches are different depending on the market access scenario in each country. Countries that reimburse patients through patient access programs will see therapies introduced more rapidly, while other countries without that system are more of a challenge and will take longer. Morocco is in the process of setting a patient access program and we hope that our innovative therapies to be reimbursed soon.

How has your experience as Country Manager in Morocco helped prepare you to take on the wider region of AFMET?

The AFMET region is diversified and complex. Morocco was for me the first approach of this giant continent that I discovered after years spent in Europe, South-Asia and China.

Morocco was a great learning, complex but very exciting thanks to its huge potential and amazing energy, linked to its fast development, requiring agility and quick adaptation. At Pierre Fabre Morocco we have a great and professional team under the leadership of M. Khaled LAOUITI, covering all North Africa and supporting the full range of products.

I do not manage the day-to-day in each country, but I worked closely with the managers, guiding them in the direction of the entire group’s strategy and KPIs

Pierre Fabre wrapped up a 3-year transformation plan that brought the company’s two divisions together. Can you tell us how this transformation has played out in your region and where the company stands today?

The transformation was very logical, bringing all of Pierre Fabre’s activities under one roof. We had two silos, dermo-cosmetic on one side and pharma on the other side. The change was good to build synergies, optimize costs, and focus investments on patient-centricity and digital strategies. The goal was to change the management to a single line of reporting. This was completed at the end of

2022.

On the medical side, our goal is to bring promising treatments to patients with unmet medical needs mainly in oncology, but also in dermatology, and more recently, in rare diseases. With respect to dermo-cosmetics, or the OTC part of our operations, we are trying to provide solutions for all types of skin conditions, or side effects affecting the skin and scalp.

Regarding rare diseases, there is a rare genetic disorder that affects the sweat and respiratory glands, skin, hair, and teeth and is transmitted from parents to their children, Ectodermal Dysplasia, XLHED. In collaboration with the EspeRare Foundation, we have brought a new cell therapy forward that modifies the cells of the newborn to avoid the disease. This in-utero therapy is very innovative and is currently restricted to very few patients.

Can you expand on the strategic relevance of the Moroccan market to Pierre Fabre?

We have been present in Morocco for nearly 40 years. The 2 countries are very close and their collaboration in sciences and economy is remarkable, so it was very important to be in Morocco.

Currently, there are planned changes to integrate a new health insurance program into the country’s health system. It is important for us to be present while the country is evolving and bringing better health and well-being to the entire population of nearly 40 million people in Morocco.

Being in Morocco is strategic for us. Our goal now is really to enable patients to access innovation and targeted therapies and not just to patients in Europe and the US.

Every country wants to localize manufacturing and production, Morocco is no exception, what is your view regarding localization in Morocco?

Currently, we manufacture nearly 60 percent of our products for Morocco through our industrial partners in Morocco. We started this process many years ago.

We feel it is important to be close to the market and national sovereignty to manufacture its own products.

We are also working on the possibility of using Morocco as a base for exportation, as in Tunisia. We have a factory there and nearly half of its production goes to Sub-Saharan Africa.

Can you provide your insights into how you see the market's access to innovation evolving over time? What are the opportunities in Morocco as compared to other markets?

Access to medication is a very important concern not only for Morocco but for all the countries in this region. In Morocco, there are highly qualified and informed doctors who are aware of the latest treatment innovations registered in other countries. Even before products are introduced in the country, doctors know about the product's efficacy, protocol, and side effects, creating a demand to have it authorized and imported for their patients.

Patients are demanding new innovative therapies as well because they know that efficacy is there. Our duty as a company is to do our best to convince authorities to bring treatments to patients. There is no reason for some people to have access to treatment while other patients do not.

Unfortunately, there is the cost of research and production that must also be considered. Countries like Morocco must determine how to introduce new therapies into their own reimbursement programs. I am confident that over time, with joint work between innovators and health authorities, we will find a solution that will get the necessary treatments to patients.

You mentioned the manufacturing plant in Tunisia, can you expand further on the opportunities and potential for exports from Morocco?

Currently, 60 percent of our products are manufactured locally. In the future, we would like to evaluate the possibility of exporting from Morocco.

What are the priorities in the region for Pierre Fabre moving forward?

Going forward, we want to be a part of the reform of the health system in Morocco so that we can be sure that we are able to provide all of our innovative therapies to patients like in Europe and most of the other countries that we cover.

Is there anything else you want to share with our international audience that we have not already discussed?

Yes, I would like to take the opportunity to launch a demand as we are currently looking for partners for our medical and DermoCosmetic activities in East and South Sub-Saharan Africa.

See more interviews