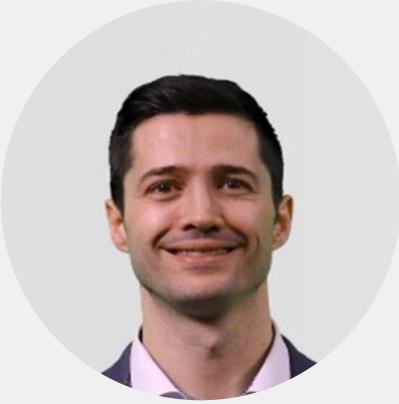
Felipe Borges dos Reis – General Manager Saudi Arabia RHQ, Eli Lilly



Transforming our affiliate into a talent powerhouse and fostering innovation aligns with our commitment to addressing healthcare challenges and making a lasting impact in Saudi Arabia

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With over 40 years of history in Saudi Arabia, in 2021 Eli Lilly moved to establish a regional headquarters in the country, underscoring its dedication to the country and region. Now led by Brazilian national Felipe Borges dos Reis, Lilly aims to tackle the pressing health concerns of diabetes and obesity in Saudi Arabia through education, destigmatization, and ensuring access to effective interventions. Borges dos Reis also outlines how the company's priorities align closely with the objectives outlined in Saudi Vision 2030, especially in healthcare.

Your career path has been quite impressive, starting in Brazil, then moving to the US, and now taking on a new challenge in Saudi Arabia. Could you share more about your career journey and the start of your new role?

I’m thrilled to be leading Lilly’s regional headquarters in Saudi Arabia, especially at a time when the country is undergoing a significant transformation in healthcare. The opportunity to make a lasting impact aligns perfectly with Lilly’s global corporate strategy, focusing on breakthrough therapies for diseases like Type 2 Diabetes, Obesity, Dementia, and various Cancers. Saudi Arabia’s ambitious healthcare priorities resonate well with our objectives, making this role both exciting and fulfilling.

As for my career journey, I attribute much of my success to joining a company that values meritocracy and prioritizes talent development. Lilly's robust people processes have allowed me to grow and thrive in various roles. My goal here in Saudi Arabia is to replicate this success by creating a talent powerhouse that attracts and retains top talent, ultimately becoming a net exporter of talent within five years.

In my first 100 days, my priorities have been twofold: aligning our strategic corporate objectives with the country's healthcare priorities and establishing connections with external stakeholders to explore collaboration opportunities. Additionally, I've focused on building strong relationships with our internal team, setting clear expectations, and fostering a culture of high performance, integrity, diversity, equity and inclusion. Effective communication and celebrating quick wins have also been essential in boosting team morale and engagement during this initial phase.

Being one of the first companies to establish a regional headquarters in Saudi Arabia, Lilly has shown a strong commitment to the country. How do you plan to strengthen this commitment as a new leader, and what does Saudi Arabia mean for Lilly?

We are incredibly proud of our longstanding commitment to Saudi Arabia, which spans over 40 years. In 2019, Lilly became one of the first pharmaceutical companies to establish a legal entity in the country, and in 2021, we established our regional headquarters, which is now fully operational. Our goal is to bring our innovative solutions to the country rapidly, addressing critical healthcare challenges and making a meaningful impact on people's lives.

Currently, our workforce in Saudi Arabia comprises over 100 employees who are highly engaged and determined to achieve our shared purpose of making life better. We have a diverse team, with approximately 80 percent of our workforce being Saudi nationals and 45 percent being females. We believe that diversity strengthens us, enabling us to better understand our customers' needs and advance innovation more effectively.

Saudi Arabia holds immense significance for Lilly, not only as a strategic market but also as a hub for innovation and growth. Our commitment to the country is unwavering, and we are dedicated to continuing our efforts to enhance healthcare outcomes and contribute positively to the local community.

With diabetes prevalence at 18.3 percent and obesity affecting 30 percent of the population in Saudi Arabia, how is Lilly working to address these pressing health concerns? Can you share more about your efforts in these areas?

Lilly has been and will always be committed to innovations and advancements in Diabetes (Type 1 and Type 2) and recently in the field of Obesity. Lilly has always positioned itself as a partner to the Saudi government to foster the Public Private Partnership (PPP) and align with the country's healthcare sector transformation's vision of having a more vibrant and healthier community.

Obesity is not just a risk factor but a chronic, progressive, and relapsing disease that has serious downstream complications. It affects over a billion people worldwide[1] and is associated with numerous health risks, including type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, certain cancers[2], sleep apnea, and more. The impact of obesity on health and mortality cannot be understated.

Addressing the rising prevalence of obesity in Saudi Arabia is indeed urgent, especially considering its serious health implications. It's crucial to dispel myths and misconceptions surrounding obesity, such as the notion that it's solely a matter of individual choice. This misconception contributes to stigma and can hinder individuals from seeking proper care and treatment for obesity as a chronic disease.

Therefore, one of our main priorities is education and awareness to eradicate the stigma associated with obesity. We aim to foster open and supportive conversations between patients and healthcare providers, encouraging individuals to seek the help they need without fear of judgment.

Another key priority is ensuring access to highly effective interventions for obesity management. Over the past decade, significant advancements have been made in understanding the pathophysiology of obesity and developing interventions that can yield impressive outcomes. We have obtained regulatory approval for these innovations, and our focus now is on making them widely accessible to those who need them.

By prioritizing education, destigmatization, and access to effective innovations, we aim to make significant strides in tackling the obesity epidemic in Saudi Arabia and improving the health and well-being of its population.

Can you highlight Lilly's efforts in combating non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as Type 2 diabetes and Obesity in Saudi Arabia in line with the Saudi 2030 vision?

Lilly has always been committed to innovation. Also, the country's commitment to accelerating innovation and providing access to breakthrough therapies highlights Saudi Arabia's proactive approach to improving healthcare outcomes. With such innovative therapies becoming available, we are optimistic about the positive impact they will have on patients' lives in Saudi Arabia and beyond. This underscores the importance of regulatory frameworks that prioritize access to innovation, ultimately leading to better health outcomes for individuals in need.

Can you elaborate on Lilly's efforts and its priorities in the field of Oncology? And where do you believe the greatest impact lies?

Innovations and advancements in the fields of oncology and hematology have always been of a priority to Lilly. Similarly, Lilly has been partnering with the Saudi government to bring and accelerate access for innovations in Oncology and Hematology. This underscores our commitment to innovation and the country. Furthermore, our focus on Saudi Arabia as a hub for launching innovations will enable us to share best practices globally, accelerating progress in healthcare innovation.

How do you perceive the alignment between the company's priorities and the priorities of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, particularly in healthcare, and what challenges do you foresee in addressing these priorities?

The alignment between the company's priorities and the priorities of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in healthcare is evident and promising. Obesity and metabolic syndrome, along with diabetes, are significant healthcare challenges in the country, and our focus on addressing these aligns perfectly with the nation's needs. Additionally, there is a growing focus on advancing care for dementia, neuroscience, immunology, and oncology, reflecting the broader healthcare landscape. While there are challenges such as IP and data protection, data generation, and scarcity of some expertise, the clear intent of the country to improve and address these challenges instils confidence. Overcoming obstacles like data generation and unifying registries will require time and effort, but we are committed to leveraging real-world evidence and expanding our presence in clinical trials to contribute to advancements in healthcare in Saudi Arabia.

What are your hopes and strategic priorities for your role in the pharmaceutical sector in the next few years? What objectives are you aiming to achieve, and what do you envision accomplishing by the time we revisit this conversation in two or three years?

Initially, as I highlighted, I'm immensely thankful for the opportunity to be present in this moment. I firmly believe that the outlook is promising, particularly with the emphasis on economic growth and investments. This momentum is poised to create a virtuous cycle, fostering increased innovation, which aligns closely with one of our foremost objectives.

Another significant objective is to transform our affiliate into a talent powerhouse by investing in the development and growth of our team. My goal is for Saudi Arabia to be globally recognized as a source of talent, with individuals being developed locally and assuming higher positions both within and outside the country. In two to three years, I hope to celebrate having cultivated a strong pool of skilled professionals contributing not only to our affiliate's success but also to the broader healthcare sector in Saudi Arabia. This transformation will be a testament to our commitment to building a sustainable talent ecosystem and driving growth in the pharmaceutical industry.

References

[1] World Obesity Day (WHO) 2022 – Accelerating action to stop obesity (who.int)

[2] De Lorenzo A, Gratteri S, Gualtieri P, Cammarano A, Bertucci P, Di Renzo L. Why primary obesity is a disease? J Transl Med. 2019 May 22;17(1):169. doi: 10.1186/s12967-019-1919-y. PMID: 31118060; PMCID: PMC6530037

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