Fadi Ghanayem – Managing Director, bioMérieux Saudi Arabia & CCAIM



In Saudi Arabia, there is a keen interest in being at the forefront of adopting pioneering technologies and conducting research to validate their efficacy.

11.06.2024

Tags: Saudi Arabia, GCC, MEA, MENA, Caucasus, Central Asia, Iran, Mongolia, BioMérieux

Fadi Ghanayem, Managing Director for Saudi Arabia and Caucasus, Central Asia, Iran and Mongolia (CCAIM) at French diagnostics firm BioMérieux discusses the remarkable growth he has witnessed in Saudi Arabia thanks to the government's push to improve healthcare and prevention in recent years. In addition, he outlines the opportunities that stand to arise as these initiatives evolve and mature by 2030 and Saudi continues to embrace innovations such as the company's newer and faster diagnostics tests and the solutions it is developing to manage and consolidate data.

During the last five years, the world has faced significant challenges, particularly with the global COVID-19 pandemic. How has bioMérieux contributed to the fight against infectious diseases during this time?

Over the past five years, our company has played a pivotal role in combating infectious diseases, especially amid the COVID-19 pandemic. We have developed a range of diagnostic solutions tailored to identifying and addressing COVID-19 specifically. These tools have not only facilitated accurate diagnosis of COVID-19 but have also aided healthcare professionals in managing associated complications and other infectious diseases. Our commitment to innovation and global health has been central to our efforts in combating COVID-19 and other infectious diseases.

Do you feel that diagnostics as an industry and as a healthcare solution is more valued by healthcare stakeholders today?

Diagnostics plays a crucial role in patient care pathways, guiding healthcare professionals to prescribe the most appropriate treatments. It has become increasingly recognized as a critical component in patient management, from initial complaints to seeking healthcare and beyond. Moreover, diagnostics not only ensures accurate treatment but also contributes to broader healthcare goals. For instance, early and accurate diagnosis can lead to reduced antibiotic usage, mitigating antimicrobial resistance, which is a significant global threat. By emphasizing proper antibiotic usage, diagnostics contributes to combating antimicrobial resistance, thereby addressing a silent pandemic.

Although the company's annual report shows a slight decline in overall profits, there was an increase in sales, notably by 8.5 percent in the EMEA region, which includes your area. Could you elaborate on performance, specifically in Saudi Arabia?

In Saudi Arabia, we have witnessed remarkable growth, closely tied to the country's rapid transformation across various sectors, notably healthcare. The government's focus on well-being and initiatives to enhance healthcare standards have spurred significant developments. This includes expanding healthcare infrastructure, increasing hospital capacities, and establishing specialized centers, all aimed at improving healthcare accessibility and quality. Consequently, this transformation has created abundant opportunities, not only for diagnostic companies but also for healthcare manufacturers. There has been a notable emphasis on specialized areas such as cancer treatment and diagnostics, particularly highlighted during the COVID-19 crisis. As a result, the entire healthcare market has experienced growth, reflected both in size and quality, with opportunities for various players to thrive.

What opportunities are being created for companies like yours by the Saudi government's emphasis on preventive healthcare?

Having worked in this sector for 25 years, I have witnessed a longstanding government priority on public health and preventive measures. However, there has been a need for these initiatives to evolve and mature, moving towards greater independence and efficiency. By 2030, the plan is for

these clusters within the Ministry of Health to operate autonomously, allowing them to maximize efficiency and resource utilization. With a renewed focus on public health and preventive medicine, we anticipate significant opportunities in this space, aligning with the broader mission of improving public health outcomes.

How do you define innovation within the diagnostics space, and what emerging technologies or formats are currently spearheading change?

In the realm of diagnostics, innovation encompasses a broad spectrum of advancements. It can range from enhancing the efficiency of workflow in laboratories through bioimaging to streamlining microbiology processes while focusing on decentralized testing and pioneering diagnostics to be as close as possible to patients. For example, innovations may involve optimizing specific microbiology solutions or implementing automation to manage lab workflows more effectively. Moreover, innovation in diagnostics often involves the development of new testing methods tailored to rapidly and accurately diagnose specific diseases, such as tuberculosis or other infectious diseases. These innovations aim to reduce testing times significantly, potentially from 48 hours to as little as one hour or even 45 minutes, facilitating quicker diagnosis, treatment planning, enhancing antimicrobial stewardship as well as reducing costs.

New technologies naturally come with a cost. How willing are stakeholders in Saudi Arabia to pay for these new machines and instruments?

Our presence in Saudi Arabia is a testament to stakeholders’ recognition of the value these innovations bring. They prioritize patient outcomes and are willing to invest in solutions that enhance workflow efficiency and treatment results. Stakeholders not only listen to our arguments but actively seek out innovations to integrate into patient care. In Saudi Arabia, there is a keen interest in being at the forefront of adopting pioneering technologies and conducting research to validate their efficacy.

Saudi is witnessing significant advancements in digitization and AI, but how do these initiatives intersect with the diagnostics industry?

It all boils down to data. By harnessing data, whether retrospective or current, we can gain insights into the epidemiology of diseases and tailor effective responses. Diagnostic equipment generates vast amounts of data on microorganisms, such as viruses and bacteria. However, to derive value from this data, it needs to be interconnected across various settings and labs nationwide. Our focus is on developing solutions to manage and consolidate this data, enabling healthcare professionals and researchers to analyze it comprehensively. While this process is complex and requires time, ongoing projects with the Ministry of Health aim to pilot data connectivity in specific centers. Overcoming challenges like data privacy laws and leveraging local cloud services are critical steps towards achieving a unified data source accessible to the government and researchers. As infrastructure improves and technology evolves, the prospects of seamlessly integrating these data sources become increasingly feasible.

Navigating localization initiatives can be particularly challenging for medium-sized European companies like BioMérieux compared to larger publicly traded corporations. Could you shed some light on how these initiatives impact companies differently, especially in your dealings with Ministry of Investment of Saudi Arabia (MISA)?

Localization initiatives do pose varying challenges depending on the size and structure of the company. Our approach involves close collaboration with MISA to secure exemptions where necessary, particularly concerning staffing quotas and long-term localization plans. It is essential to commit only to what we can feasibly deliver, avoiding overpromising. While the process may not always move as swiftly as desired, the environment remains accommodating. Government departments are receptive, willing to engage, and accessible, provided effective management of the relationship.

As you approach nearly seven years with bioMérieux, could you share your vision for the short to medium term? What milestones do you aim to achieve as Saudi Arabia undergoes transformation, and how will your company contribute to healthcare in the country?

My focus remains on fulfilling our company’s mission, deeply rooted in combating infectious diseases and promoting healthier lives for all citizens and residents of Saudi Arabia, irrespective of nationality or age. Partnering closely with the Ministry of Health and other healthcare institutions, our goal is to implement this mission effectively. Recently, we have unveiled a comprehensive five-

year plan aimed at enhancing diagnostic workflows, ensuring timely access to innovative solutions, and ultimately empowering healthcare professionals to prescribe early and accurate treatments, crucial in combating global threats like antimicrobial resistance. Our commitment lies in leveraging innovation to safeguard public health, a responsibility we collectively shoulder.

See more interviews