Lyes Salah – General Manager, Amgen Saudi Arabia



Success is not an individual achievement, but a collective effort driven by empowered teams

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Lyes Salah, General Manager of Amgen Saudi Arabia, delves into the company's commitment to supporting Saudi Vision 2030 through innovation, strategic partnerships, and talent development. By advancing healthcare accessibility, fostering diversity, and driving digital transformation, Amgen plays a pivotal role in the Kingdom's healthcare transformation.

What were your initial impressions upon arriving in Saudi Arabia, and how has your extensive background shaped your approach as General Manager of Amgen Saudi Arabia?

As General Manager of Amgen Saudi Arabia, a role I have held for over two and a half years, I bring more than two decades of experience at Amgen in France, where I held a variety of commercial leadership roles. My journey has included positions such as Business Unit Head, Key Account Manager, and Subject Matter Expert in management, each of which contributed to a deep understanding of strategic growth and operational excellence. From the moment I arrived in Saudi Arabia, I was captivated by the nation's unique and vibrant energy. There is a pervasive sense of optimism and determination here—a "can-do" mindset that fosters an environment of innovation and progress. This spirit, coupled with a collective confidence in a brighter future, creates an inspiring atmosphere where transformative ideas take shape.

What stands out even more is the pace of change across various sectors. While Saudi Arabia has long been associated with the oil industry, the country is undergoing a remarkable diversification. Healthcare is now emerging as a critical focus, alongside other growing industries such as sports, entertainment, and technology. This transformation is not only evident in the rapidly evolving infrastructure, such as the construction of iconic towers and developments, but also in the dynamic participation of its people across these sectors. The convergence of ambition, talent, and opportunity makes this an extraordinary environment to contribute to and grow within.

What strategic steps has Amgen taken to strengthen its position in Saudi Arabia, and how has the company contributed to the country's evolving healthcare landscape?

Over the past two and a half years, Amgen Saudi Arabia has rapidly positioned itself as one of the most dynamic and fastest-growing multinational companies in the Kingdom. This remarkable trajectory has been driven by the successful registration of the majority of its product portfolio (oncology, hematology, inflammatory diseases, cardiovascular health, bone disorders, and rare diseases), enabling the company to address critical healthcare needs in the region. Recognizing the importance of sustainable growth, Amgen has undergone a significant transformation, evolving from a Technical and Scientific Office (TSO) to a Limited Liability Company (LLC). This transformation was built on the pillars of robust governance, a refined market engagement strategy, and a comprehensive focus on talent development, particularly in enhancing the leadership capabilities of its teams.

In alignment with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, Amgen has actively embraced the nation's ambitious healthcare agenda, which includes a strategic focus on increasing life expectancy by eight years. This objective highlights the commitment to improving the quality of life for patients while fostering private sector engagement and driving the privatization of healthcare services. Amgen's portfolio is intricately aligned with these priorities, targeting serious medical challenges such as oncology, hematology, inflammatory diseases, cardiovascular health, and bone disorders. Moreover, the company's recent acquisition of Horizon Therapeutics marks a pivotal step in expanding its expertise into rare diseases, an area of growing significance in the Kingdom's healthcare landscape.

By aligning its innovative solutions and strategic vision with the transformative goals of Vision 2030, Amgen is not only contributing to the advancement of Saudi Arabia's healthcare system but also reinforcing its role as a trusted and integral partner in the nation's journey toward a healthier

future.

What are the main growth drivers for Amgen in Saudi Arabia, and how is the company addressing key healthcare priorities while preparing for future therapeutic advancements?

Amgen’s diverse portfolio in Saudi Arabia, which spans oncology, inflammation, general medicine, and rare diseases, has proven to be a strong driver of growth. Among these, cardiovascular health stands out as a focal point due to its profound impact on public health in the Kingdom. Cardiovascular diseases account for 37% of deaths in Saudi Arabia, making them the leading cause of mortality. Compounding this challenge is the fact that the first cardiovascular event occurs, on average, a decade earlier in Saudi Arabia than in other regions globally. Addressing this issue is pivotal to improving patient outcomes and enhancing life expectancy across the population.

In response, Amgen has entered into a strategic partnership with the Saudi Heart Association through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). This collaboration is dedicated to reducing the burden of cardiovascular diseases by promoting awareness, educating healthcare providers, and driving the implementation of updated national guidelines issued two years ago. These guidelines are designed to standardize and enhance prevention and management practices across hospitals and healthcare institutions. A significant focus of this initiative is on reducing elevated levels of low-density lipoprotein (LDL), or “bad” cholesterol, a major contributor to cardiovascular risk. Amgen’s innovative treatments in this area underscore its commitment to delivering tangible improvements in patient care.

Looking ahead, Amgen is preparing to expand its impact through the launch of a robust pipeline of new therapies. These late-stage developments include cutting-edge treatments targeting oncology, inflammation, cardiovascular health, and obesity. By aligning its current portfolio with the evolving needs of the healthcare sector and investing in the future, Amgen is solidifying its position as a key player in addressing the critical challenges and opportunities within Saudi Arabia’s healthcare landscape.

How does Amgen’s approach to biosimilars in Saudi Arabia distinguish the company, and what strategies ensure a balance between cost savings and uncompromised quality?

Amgen’s approach to biosimilars in Saudi Arabia is marked by its ability to seamlessly integrate innovation and affordability, a distinction rooted in the company’s deep expertise in biologics. Unlike many competitors, Amgen develops its biosimilars entirely in-house, from research and development to commercialization. This comprehensive capability allows the company to maintain unparalleled control over quality while addressing the growing demand for cost-effective treatments.

Biosimilars play a pivotal role in transforming healthcare budgets by offering high-quality alternatives to originator biologics. The financial savings generated from their adoption can be strategically reinvested into innovative therapies, thereby advancing patient care and supporting broader healthcare priorities. Amgen’s biosimilars strategy is built on what it terms a “brand-like” approach, ensuring that these treatments meet the same rigorous standards of safety, efficacy, and reliability as their originators. This commitment is further reinforced by targeted educational initiatives for healthcare providers, equipping them with the knowledge and confidence needed to integrate biosimilars into patient care seamlessly.

In a competitive landscape shaped by both local and global players, Amgen’s dual focus on affordability and uncompromised quality positions the company as a leader in the biosimilars sector. By combining its legacy of biologics innovation with a clear vision for sustainable healthcare solutions, Amgen continues to play an instrumental role in Saudi Arabia’s ongoing investment in biologics and biosimilars, delivering solutions that benefit both patients and the broader healthcare system.

How has Saudi Arabia enhanced access to healthcare innovation, and what role has Amgen played in advancing this progress through its regulatory collaborations?

Saudi Arabia has made extraordinary strides in creating a healthcare ecosystem designed to attract and accelerate innovation, with the Saudi Food and Drug Authority (SFDA) at the forefront of this transformation. The SFDA’s attainment of Maturity Level 4 certification from the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2023 marks a significant milestone, underscoring its commitment to global regulatory excellence and its ability to facilitate timely access to groundbreaking therapies.

Amgen’s experience with the SFDA has been exemplary, characterized by a strong and constructive partnership. This collaborative approach has enabled Amgen to achieve remarkable regulatory milestones, including the approval of a rare disease therapy where Saudi Arabia became the first country, after the United States, to register the product. Such achievements highlight the

SFDA’s dedication to fostering a regulatory framework that supports swift and efficient processes. Today, products can be registered within 12 months, a pace that positions Saudi Arabia ahead of regions like Europe and Japan in terms of market entry.

This enhanced regulatory environment has solidified Saudi Arabia’s reputation as a fast-entry and strategically significant market for new therapies. For Amgen, this progress not only facilitates the timely introduction of its existing portfolio but also paves the way for the launch of its pipeline of innovative treatments. By leveraging Saudi Arabia’s forward-thinking regulatory advancements, Amgen continues to play a critical role in delivering transformative solutions that align with the Kingdom’s ambition to be a leader in global healthcare innovation.

How is value-based healthcare shaping the future of Saudi Arabia’s healthcare system, and what role has Amgen played in advancing this approach?

Value-based healthcare is increasingly becoming a cornerstone of Saudi Arabia’s healthcare strategy, focusing on enhancing patient outcomes, promoting adherence to treatments, and optimizing healthcare resources. Amgen has been a key player in this transition, most notably through its managed entry agreement with the Ministry of Health in 2019–2020 for a cardiovascular medication. This innovative outcome-based partnership prioritized not only access but also the continuous monitoring of the medication’s efficacy, safety, and patient adherence, reflecting a holistic approach to delivering value-driven care.

Amgen’s efforts extend beyond individual agreements. The company has implemented patient support programs designed to boost adherence and ensure long-term treatment success. Additionally, Amgen has partnered with other organizations to introduce advanced testing solutions for onco-hematology patients and support home infusion therapies. These initiatives not only improve treatment compliance but also alleviate pressure on healthcare infrastructure by freeing up hospital beds. By integrating these strategies, Amgen exemplifies how a pharmaceutical company can deliver measurable value through innovative partnerships and patient-centric initiatives, aligning seamlessly with Saudi Arabia’s vision of a modern, efficient, and outcome-focused healthcare system.

How is Amgen contributing to Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030 by advancing healthcare accessibility, innovation, and quality of life?

Amgen plays a significant role in supporting the healthcare transformation outlined in Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030, focusing on extending life expectancy, enhancing quality of life, and ensuring broad access to innovative treatments. The company’s contributions are deeply integrated into the Kingdom’s healthcare ambitions, encompassing prevention, professional development, research, talent cultivation, and equitable access to therapies.

A key pillar of Amgen’s efforts lies in preventive healthcare, where the company promotes public awareness of chronic conditions such as cardiovascular diseases and advocates for healthier lifestyles. These initiatives are supported by patient support programs designed to improve treatment adherence and optimize outcomes.

Alongside this, Amgen is dedicated to empowering healthcare professionals through ongoing education. By connecting local practitioners with international experts and facilitating knowledge exchange, the company ensures that the Saudi medical community remains at the cutting edge of therapeutic advancements.

Amgen is also driving progress in clinical research, focusing on generating local data to better understand the unique needs of Saudi patients. The company has successfully conducted phase 2 and phase 3 clinical trials in the Kingdom and continues to expand these efforts by certifying research centers and preparing healthcare providers to conduct high-quality clinical trials. These initiatives enable the development of real-world evidence to refine treatment strategies and improve patient outcomes.

Talent development forms another cornerstone of Amgen’s strategy. The company is investing in cultivating the next generation of Saudi leaders in the pharmaceutical and biotechnology sectors, laying the foundation for a sustainable healthcare ecosystem led by skilled professionals. This long-term vision is vital for ensuring the Kingdom’s success in achieving its biotech ambitions.

Amgen’s commitment to early and equitable access to advanced treatments further reinforces its role in transforming Saudi healthcare. Notable initiatives include early access programs for oncology and rare disease therapies, such as a lung cancer treatment that reached patients before its official launch.

By integrating these efforts into its broader strategy, Amgen demonstrates a comprehensive and cohesive approach to supporting Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030. Its focus on prevention, education, research, talent, and accessibility positions the company as a key contributor to the Kingdom’s ambition of building a patient-centered, innovative, and sustainable healthcare system.

How do you evaluate the progress of digital transformation in Saudi Arabia’s healthcare sector, and how is Amgen contributing to this advancement?

Saudi Arabia’s healthcare sector is undergoing a remarkable digital transformation, driven by the government’s emphasis on integrating advanced technologies and data-driven solutions. Amgen is uniquely positioned to contribute to this evolution. We are witnessing a transformative shift driven by the convergence of technology and biotechnology. At Amgen, we’ve been proactively preparing for this era for over a decade, investing heavily in AI, data science, and other advanced technologies. This strategic focus aims to accelerate drug discovery and development, enabling us to bring innovative therapies to patients more rapidly. We believe this technological advancement will not only expedite the time-to-market for new treatments but also enhance our ability to reach more patients with existing therapies and gain a deeper understanding of their evolving needs. Furthermore, by embracing these cutting-edge technologies, we can optimize our internal processes, boost productivity, and equip our workforce with the future-proof skills necessary for continued professional growth. This commitment to technological innovation is exemplified by our recently established Amgen India technology and innovation hub. this highlights Amgen’s forward-thinking approach to redefining healthcare strategies through digital integration.

In Saudi Arabia, the foundational elements for digital transformation are already well-established. The country demonstrates exceptional capabilities in data collection and infrastructure, alongside a highly skilled research community. These strengths are complemented by a tech-savvy population, where digital solutions are seamlessly integrated into daily life, from government services to mobile platforms. Such a high-tech environment provides fertile ground for embedding advanced digital strategies into the healthcare system.

Amgen recognizes the significant opportunities in this space and is actively exploring partnerships with local stakeholders to drive innovation. By leveraging its expertise in AI and digital technologies, the company aims to enhance the efficiency and impact of healthcare delivery in the Kingdom. This involves not only utilizing advanced data analytics to streamline operations but also contributing to the development of cutting-edge digital healthcare solutions. With Saudi Arabia’s strong commitment to innovation and Amgen’s global leadership in digital transformation, the collaboration has the potential to set new standards in healthcare, positioning the Kingdom as a leader in the future of digital medicine.

How does Amgen approach talent development and retention in Saudi Arabia, and what measures are in place to foster leadership, diversity, and inclusion?

Amgen places significant emphasis on talent development and retention in Saudi Arabia, aligning closely with the Kingdom's Vision 2030, which underscores the importance of cultivating local talent to drive progress. Central to Amgen's strategy is the creation of an environment that not only attracts top talent but also nurtures and retains it, with a particular focus on building the next generation of leaders from within. Rather than relying on external recruitment, the company prioritizes internal growth through tailored leadership development programs, skill-building initiatives, and technical training designed to prepare employees for future challenges. This approach spans multiple functions, including marketing and medical roles, ensuring a workforce equipped with the competencies necessary for sustained success.

To retain talent, Amgen fosters a culture of clarity, transparency, and empowerment. Leadership actively communicates the company's mission and strategy, known as Amgen's "social architecture," to build trust and ensure alignment across teams. Transparency and open dialogue are further supported by an emphasis on cultivating a growth mindset and encouraging collaboration. Employees are empowered to take ownership of their contributions through cross-functional projects, fostering innovation and reinforcing the principle that success is a collective effort driven by teamwork and shared purpose.

Diversity and inclusion are equally integral to Amgen's vision. The company is committed to promoting inclusivity in its hiring and promotion practices, with a focus on gender diversity. Women now represent 35% of Amgen's workforce in Saudi Arabia, including more than 40% of leadership roles, a marked improvement achieved over the past year. Despite this progress, the company remains committed to further increasing female representation, reflecting its dedication to fostering an inclusive environment that supports diverse perspectives and drives equitable opportunities.

By integrating leadership development, talent retention, and diversity into its strategic priorities, Amgen demonstrates its commitment to building a skilled, empowered, and inclusive workforce. This focus not only ensures the company's continued success but also positions it as a key contributor to Saudi Arabia's evolving healthcare landscape and its broader ambitions under Vision 2030.

What are Amgen’s strategic priorities for 2025 and 2026, and what legacy do you aspire to leave as a leader in Saudi Arabia?

Amgen’s strategic priorities for 2025 and beyond are focused on cementing its role as a trusted partner in Saudi Arabia’s healthcare transformationThe company aims to strengthen its collaboration with healthcare authorities and stakeholders while advancing the growth of its current portfolio and preparing for the introduction of its robust late-stage pipeline and prioritize serving patients in Saudi Arabia throughout 2025. This pipeline includes breakthrough therapies in oncology, inflammation, cardiovascular care, and obesity—areas that are highly relevant to the Saudi population and healthcare landscape. Achieving these objectives involves comprehensive preparation, from equipping teams with the necessary skills to shaping the market and fostering an environment that supports the seamless adoption of innovative treatments.

As a leader, my personal goal is to nurture a new generation of talented professionals within Amgen who can carry forward the company’s vision and success in Saudi Arabia. For me, the ultimate achievement would be to hand over a strong, capable team poised to sustain Amgen’s growth and continue contributing to the Kingdom’s healthcare progress. Amgen’s pipeline aligns closely with the needs of Saudi Arabia and the aspirations of Vision 2030, and leaving behind a thriving organization with a well-prepared leadership team would represent the legacy I strive to build.

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